

PROPERTY OF
THE CHURCH ON THE WAY

✓
 Pridham is, we suppose, of the ^{moderate} Brethren School
 originally, but he is not carried away by any
 theories, being essentially a man of sober
 mind. He does not say much that is very
 striking; but he goes deep, & responds
 solidly.

B.C.

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Pridham, Arthur.

Notes and reflections on the epistle
to the Galatians.

NOTES AND REFLECTIONS
ON
THE EPISTLE TO THE GALATIANS.

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ON

THE EPISTLE

TO

THE GALATIANS.

BY

ARTHUR PRIDHAM.

"THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF THY TESTIMONIES IS EVERLASTING."

Psalm cxix. 144.

"THE SON OF GOD IS COME, AND HATH GIVEN US AN UNDERSTANDING."

1 John v. 20.

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PREFACE.

THE Spirit of truth is ever of one mind, and as the promised Comforter and Teacher of God's saints He occupies Himself with Christ alone, in whom the fulness of the Godhead dwells; yet diversity of judgment is of all things the most common in the Church. The faith of God's elect will surely stand, and mark them to the end in the sight of Him who knows whom He has chosen, and whose voice has sounded in their hearts; yet how little of that unity of mind exists which should attest, in the activity of charity, the common origin of all who are by sovereign grace "the children of the light!"

A sense of this humiliating deficiency must needs bring heaviness of heart to any who in this day of stirs and greetings, of lofty pretensions and persistent self-assertion, attempt to "put the brethren in remembrance"¹ of things already known; appealing not to itching ears, but to awakened and truth-craving hearts. But the end is well worthy of the toil, even though the work itself should give the labourer no

¹ 1 Tim. iv. 6.

present joy. And be it here said thankfully, to the praise of Him who comforts the otherwise disconsolate, that joy is *great*.

Of the latter-day tokens which abound on every side, the most fatal, perhaps, is the increasing *lightness* with which the things of God are treated. "Salvation made easy" seems, to a large extent, the modern idea of the gospel, while will-worship, under the opposite form of a laborious and punctilious religiousness, divides with high-minded unbelief the mass of formal godliness. To many, an entrance to the kingdom seems the easiest of all things, because doctrine is shallow and is mated with an easy faith. The way that is thought by multitudes to lead to life eternal is being widened continually by the clever and accommodating sleight of men, in whose hands God's perpetual statutes take the new and unimportant form of "questions;" and smoothness and conformity to natural sympathies and tastes are accepted as the marks of a true shepherd, by a fast increasing number of those who continue still to name the name of Christ.

But the Father and the world which crucified His Son are not at one, though men are already half-persuaded by a false Christianity to believe it so.² The grace of the gospel is most truly *free*; free as the air we breathe, and as the sunshine that gives nature all its joy. But it is the grace of *God*, and calls for the *obedience of faith*. And we have it on the testimony of one who had a deep experimental knowledge of

² 1 John ii. 16; v. 19.

that grace which men are now so thoughtlessly disposed to turn to license, and who speaks both as a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed, that the righteous man, though fully justified by grace, is yet "with difficulty saved."³ If faith has its victory, it also has its *fight*; fought willingly and hopefully by those who know both the value of the prize and the secret of the only strength that wins; who, with a just sense of the power of the adversary, are yet always confident in Him who is the breaker of all oppositions, and the subduer of His people to Himself in the effectual power of His love.

The difference between a true abiding in Christ, and the pursuit of what seems to ourselves the way of right,⁴ is strikingly exemplified in what we know of the history of the Galatian Churches. They had heard God's gospel and had eagerly embraced it; receiving with an ardent love the messenger who brought glad tidings to their souls. His feet were beautiful in their eyes upon the mountains which encircled their remote abode. But an utter change had since passed upon their minds, through the opening of their ears to other words. The vineyard of the Lord had in the meanwhile been hurtfully invaded by the stranger, and plants of His own planting were already casting their withered first-fruits to the ground. Christ's sheep had ceased to listen to the Shepherd's voice, and were turned again to soul-deluding fables; with what moral results is shown

³ *μόλις σώζεται*, 1 Peter iv. 18. ⁴ Prov. xiv. 12.

at large in the epistle. It is a lesson for all time, and never, one may safely venture to affirm, more needed by the Church at large than now.

There will no doubt be a varied judgment of these Notes on the part of readers equally sincere. That they should be accepted by any, as a perfect interpretation of the inspired words of the apostle, is neither my expectation nor my wish. God's truth is not exhaustible by human comment, but remains to the end of His children's earthly pilgrimage as a full fountain of supply to all who, "through faith in Christ Jesus," seek for saving wisdom in the word of grace.⁵ But my sorrow will be great if what I now put forth should fail to minister in any measure to the joy and profit of His much-divided flock.

Books of this kind are taken up by readers of very different descriptions, and for very different ends. To "please men" generally, and in their natural state, can never be the wish of any true servant of righteousness;⁶ yet there is a sense in which to do this is among the highest aims of love.⁷ If my words give displeasure to the high-minded and self-satisfied, but comfort to the poor in spirit; if I gladden the righteous, and make the careless sad; if timid and self-judging piety is cheered, and hypocrisy deprived of its false hope; if, through a perusal of the following pages, erroneous fears are exchanged in any honest heart for a true confidence, and a reason is found by any anxious seeker of God's peace for cherishing that

⁵ 2 Tim. iii. 15-17; Acts xx. 32.

⁶ Luke vi. 26; Gal. i. 10.

⁷ 1 Cor. x. 33.

hope which maketh not ashamed, I shall have much more than a reward.

There is, I dare think, nothing in this book which need offend a lover of the truth. But by some who may open it in search of knowledge only, exception may probably be taken to the length and frequency of the hortative and admonitory observations which are interwoven with the general exposition. To objectors of this kind I have one common, and I trust sufficient, answer to make: I do not, as an interpreter of Scripture, consider *minds* so much as *souls*. I write not to convey information only, or even chiefly, but rather to feed the faith and hope of those whose desire is to grow in the grace and true knowledge of the Lord. Still I should feel open to a just censure, if in an explanatory work of this description any passage in the original writing were neglected or left without remark. From this blame, however, I persuade myself, the present work is free. An attentive reader will find that no difficulty has been shunned or lightly set aside, and that all topics of a lasting spiritual interest, embraced in this brief but inestimable epistle, have been dealt with faithfully at least, and with a fulness proportioned to what seemed to the writer's mind the relative importance of each.

Little need be here said respecting the cast and style of this epistle, or the circumstances under which it was produced. The time and place of its composition are alike unknown; the occasion is apparent even to the least attentive reader. As in

other instances sound human emotions, whether of astonishment, of anger, of tender compassion, or of grief, become the media through which the Holy Ghost conveys His own unerring words. Paul felt as an injured yet much loving and enduring man, while writing with plenary authority as the Lord's apostle. His zeal was with both knowledge and affection; while his stern and uncompromising earnestness of tone, when unmasking the subterfuges of hypocrisy or insisting on the sovereign claims of truth, is worthy of the cause he has in hand.

He wrote by divine inspiration, with a definite aim and purpose, as one set for the defence and confirmation of the gospel of Christ against the specious machinations of the father of lies. My task has been to elucidate and enforce practically his teaching in its obvious bearing on the times in which we live. From the beginning of the gospel, those who *preached* the faith had also to *contend* for the faith against its many adversaries; and in an age which makes a false boast of being *Christian*, this first necessity is felt solemnly to be the last also and most pressing of the claims which "the grace of our God" establishes upon the hearts of those who truly know Him in His Son.⁸

As to the contents of this volume generally, I had rather that they should discover themselves to the inquiring reader than be displayed in the form of preliminary analysis. No wise Christian will expect much novelty of thought in what claims to be a

⁸ Jude 1-4; Rev. iii. 10.

faithful echo only of inspired words. Of the few distinctive features, therefore, which belong to the present work, I will here notice two only, as perhaps the most important.

1. Towards the close of chap. ii.⁹ I have endeavoured, by a literal and unstrained version of verse 16, to set in a clearer light and present in a truer and more harmonious relation the equally divine doctrines of Law and Grace; faith, and not works, being our means of justification, while the law's end for righteousness is both descried and attained, by the true believer, in Him who is the ever-blessed Object of his faith.

2. In chap. iv., at the close of the exposition of verse 3,¹ there occurs a digressive enquiry of some length, respecting the true standing of those saints of God who lived and died before the first advent of the Lord, and their relation to the Church of the New Testament. Some apology is, I feel, due for the introduction of this disquisition, since, though by no means foreign to the apostle's argument, it interrupts, to some it may seem, perhaps unseasonably, its natural flow. My hope is that, by those who weigh it candidly, its sufficient justification will be found in the practical interest of the subject.

My desire is to check, so far as lies in me, the common but injurious habit of theorizing on the things of Christ. What is written by His own inspired messengers is written for our learning, and for the increase of our joy in God; but much has of late

⁹ Pages 93-98.

¹ Pages 180-202.

years been put forth on the subject of the Church which cannot claim a higher origin than man. Mishandled truth is not the least hurtful of the vanities which are common among men, and I cannot but regard as one of these the disposition often manifested by modern teachers of repute to distribute, with a presumed accuracy, and, as it were, to parcel out finally, the measureless portion which God has provided for His many sons in Christ.

It has been ruled, for example, in some quarters that the patriarchs are not finally included in the Church. But this seems, in my humble judgment, to savour of bold precipitation rather than of the diffidence which should belong to partial knowledge. *For God has nowhere said this*; nor do I think that what He *has* said, when its whole bearings are considered, countenances this conclusion. The unsettled state of my own mind on this very interesting, though secondary, question has been frequently avowed in my former publications. I may now say, that a closer study of the Epistle to the Galatians has had the effect of inclining me much more strongly than heretofore to the earlier view, which still forms, I believe, a part of the faith of the majority of Christians: that believers, namely, from the exile of Adam to the second advent of the Lord, comprise what in the mind of the Spirit is "the Church;" while, in a very *special* and important sense, that name and the honours which attach to it belong to those who in the present dispensation glory in His cross.

I believe that when God gave *Himself* to Abram,

He gave *all*; the manner of His love to be unfolded in due time.² And this just makes the difference between the Spirit's words by *Moses*, and the Spirit's words by *Paul*. . What was hidden *in* Himself,³ was yet *given with* Himself; and we children are before our fathers in our enjoyment of the fully manifested light. This subject has been by no means exhaustively treated in the pages to which reference has been made, yet with sufficient clearness, it is hoped, to help an intelligent Christian reader to his own satisfactory conclusion.

The knowledge that in writing thus I shall offend not a few far better Christians than myself distresses but does not deter me. I take comfort in the recollection that truth never suffers from discussion. What is written in the following sheets is open to the freest criticism; and if they who hold the narrower and more positive estimate of God's declared, but partly apprehended counsels, have truth really on their side, my own doubts and the frank statement of them will afford them a fresh and advantageous opportunity of making convincingly evident their sounder and more scriptural views. Meanwhile let all who are "of God" remember well that to know *Him*, and continue in His love, is better than to know all mysteries. Rightly received, the knowledge of the latter implies also an increase of the former; but it is too possible to make a hurtful separation of these things.

I ask nothing from my reader but a sincere and

² Gen. xv. 1; 1 John iii. 1, 2. ³ Eph. iii. 9.

willing heed to what is written for his sake. Let nothing be accepted that does not carry with it a full scriptural proof; let him, on the other hand, *reject* nothing that his heart and conscience own to be according to the Scriptures, because it clashes, peradventure, with his own traditional impressions. Every one of us shall give account to God; and that with an especial reference to what He has caused to be written for our instruction in the knowledge of His will. It is therefore of the first importance that the views and principles which determine our course, and govern our conduct here below, should be founded on the plainest declarations of His word.

In the ordinary sense of the term, this volume cannot, I think, be fairly called a controversial work. Truth opposes error always; and so far as I have been enabled to give faithful expression to the Spirit's mind, I am in glad and hearty antagonism to each and all of the manifold heresies which infest our modern Christianity. But a few only of these fall within the compass of the present work.

I write for *Christians*; for the young especially and the feeble-minded; for the hesitating and the sorrowing soul, in the name and by the gracious permission of our common Lord. To His mercy I commend myself, and my words to the wise and impartial consideration of such as love, and remember, and seek Him in His ways.

WESTON-SUPER-MARE,
January, 1872.

NOTES AND REFLECTIONS
ON THE
EPISTLE TO THE GALATIANS.

CHAPTER I.

“PAUL, an apostle, not of men, neither by man,” &c. These opening words, so highly characteristic in their tone of the inspired writer whose epistle we are preparing to consider, receive, as might be expected, their form and colour from the occasion which impelled him to take up his pen. Always and in every place it was an object of Paul’s jealous care to assert distinctly the divine origin of his title and authority as an apostle of Jesus Christ; and in his two epistles to the Church of God at Corinth we may note admiringly the consummate and unanswerable wisdom with which, through the grace given to him, he knew how to establish his official claims, when these were questioned, to the effectual silencing of all who ventured to dispute them.

But in the present instance a task of more importance lies before him than the correction of wrong impressions about himself or his apostolate, or than the reparation even of grave derelictions both of faith

and practice, such as had called for his addresses to the Church last mentioned. Doctrinal error, which at Corinth had begun its mischief only, though already it claimed "some" for its prey among an assembly whose general character was richness both of knowledge and utterance in the faith,¹ had seized generally upon the hearts as well as brains of the Galatian saints. The wolf had counterfeited so adroitly and successfully the voice of the true Shepherd as to induce them to transfer to a destructive lie the eager veneration and desire with which they had once greeted and embraced God's living truth in Christ. If, therefore, in this epistle Paul seems to write about himself (and, indeed, on this topic he has much to say), it shall be at least in such a tone and manner as to prove the fidelity of his own stewardship as a minister of God, by his re-assertion of the claims of his outraged and dishonoured Lord. His words, moreover, shall convince all who read them thoughtfully of the deadly nature of the snare into which the father of lies was enticing the unwary yet right-wishing souls which he had begotten by the gospel as his true children in the faith, and over whom he watched, though from a distance, both with the jealousy of personal love, and in the anxious spirit of one who thought of them as a charge conferred upon him by the Lord, and of which he had, therefore, to render an account.

For them and for us also, to whom the Spirit now speaks not less distinctly by the same words than to those to whom they were at first addressed, Paul is an apostle "not of men, neither by man."² The first

¹ 1 Cor. i. 5; xv. 12. ² οὐκ ἀπ' ἀνθρώπων οὐδὲ δι' ἀνθρώπου.

part of this statement disclaims a human origin for his apostolate; the second disowns not less positively all human means or instrumentality in the appointment and direction of his work. In thus expressing himself the apostle is not discrediting a faithful human tradition of God's oracles, such as he elsewhere enjoins on his own son in the faith and fellow-labourer in the gospel.³ But because he is about to denounce radical and destructive error in an authoritative tone, and to expose in a spirit of unsparing condemnation the false practice and pretensions of those who had introduced it among the churches of Galatia, he asserts thus distinctly a title to address them to which none, he well knew, of his adversaries could venture in their own persons to lay claim. Truth is of God; and Paul both knew assuredly in his own spirit, and would have them also know, whose messenger he was. Error is, alas! both of men and by man. Its common and all-productive root is the perverted heart and understanding of the first man's seed.⁴ The energizing power which compels it from its hiding-place, and shapes it into definite and active form, is the same lying spirit that first tempted Eve to sin. Such was and is the source and character, not only of the false persuasion which was working so disastrously among the flock of God then in Galatia, but of each and all of those countless aberrations from sound doctrine which have been recorded for our warning both by inspired and uninspired witnesses, and which abound so exuberantly in these last sad times.

Men did not send Paul, nor did he speak of men.

³ 2 Tim. i. 13; ii. 2.

⁴ Gen. viii. 21.

His grace and apostleship came from another source.⁵ They were "by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead." As the Holy Ghost proceedeth from the Father and the Son, a true messenger whom He inspired could refer his mission with equal propriety to one or the other, or to both these sacred names. But their combination in this order is found here only, and is to be referred, no doubt, to the occasion. By the law the testimony of two men is true.⁶ Against, therefore, the specious practisings of the spirit of error the double attestation of the Father and the Son is claimed for his own title and service by this anointed minister of God, as he prepares to vindicate the gospel of God, as the ministry of life and righteousness, against the dangerous ignorance of foolish men.

To the same purpose also is his pointed reference to the Lord's resurrection from the dead. The law's dominion is till death; but the righteousness and hope of the believer is his risen Lord; and, in the presence of that great light of life eternal, "where is the scribe?"⁷ Nature and natural things are the sphere within which error finds its opportunity of mischief. Its appeals and persuasives are effectual only on our minds and sympathies as *men*. But the true believer has received, as a new creature in Christ, another understanding which rejects instinctively all falsehood, and derives its light and nourishment from truth alone.⁸ The gospel of God flows now to the hearts of His true people from the lips of their risen and glorified Redeemer, who is come by

⁵ Rom. i. 5.

⁶ John viii. 17.

⁷ Rom. vii. 1; 1 Cor. i. 20.

⁸ 1 John ii. 21; v. 20.

the Spirit to preach to us the peace which He made when He gave Himself to death for our sins ; and its just effect is to place its recipients in spirit where the ever-blessed object of their faith has personally entered for their sakes.⁹ For by faith the true namers of the name of Christ are both dead and risen, yea, ascended also, with the Lord. Forgetfulness of this their true standing in the grace of God had made the churches of Galatia a prey to the deceiver. The apostle, therefore, makes this fundamental point of evangelical doctrine the basis and fulcrum of all that he has it in his heart to write.

Verse 2. "And all the brethren which are with me," &c. Writing as God's messenger and witness in vindication of His gospel, Paul is not now content, as in other instances, to join a second or third name only with his own, in token of ministerial fellowship and of a common interest on the part of Christ's true servants in those whom for His sake, and in the bowels of His love, they serve. Full of the all-important topic which engrosses his whole soul, and conscious that in his person the Lord is avenging the cause of His own truth, he calls *all* the brethren who are with him as approving witnesses of what he writes. *Names*, save his own, are here superfluous ; to be a true brother in the faith of Christ, was to burn against the evil which was ravaging the churches of Galatia, and to yearn with a godly anxiety towards those who were exposed to it. An impressive lesson is conveyed to us in these few words ; and we do well to consider thoughtfully this unanimity and promptitude of action in oppos-

⁹ Eph. ii. 17 ; Heb. ix. 24.

ing doctrinal error, if only to take shame to ourselves at the contrast presented to it in our own latitudinarian times. How often are excuses made, and plausible reasons given, for an indolent, if not an acquiescent, silence when doctrines are abroad which corrupt God's truth in its vital and essential principles! A sentimental agreement to differ, for the sake of what is falsely called Christian charity, even on fundamental points of doctrine, is seeking everywhere to supplant the true unity of the faith. But it concerns all real believers to remember, that if the conception and propagating of error be, as it surely is, an act of treason against the living Majesty of truth, indifference to false doctrine is not less blameworthy in a negative sense. All who are "of God" are directly interested in the duty of contending earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints. All who are truly "Christ's" owe a double allegiance of love and service to His name.

Let us note, further, the general and indiscriminate address of this epistle. It is sent, not to a particular assembly, but to the Galatian churches as a whole. There is also a significant bareness of description which can hardly fail to strike an attentive and thoughtful reader of his words. His address is to the churches or assemblies of Galatia only. He does not add, as his habit was in other cases, such appropriate phrases as "of God," or "in God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ;" nor does he write to them as "saints and faithful brethren." It is as if the doubt which he further on avows¹ oppressed him as he took his pen in hand. Churches

¹ *Infra*, chap. iv. 20.

they were, but whose? Their treatment of his letter must determine. A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump; wickedness doth burn as a fire, and spiritual corruption spreads as a contagious plague.² We know nothing of the local origin of the mournful and general defection of these churches from the grace of God; but it seems to have spread with an almost electric swiftness through the entire region of Galatia. This very noticeable fact is a striking illustration of the natural readiness of the human mind to give ear to legal teaching, as to something which appeals directly to its native instincts; while sin, by its deceitful power, prevails, secretly and on ostensibly righteous pleas, to counteract the Spirit's work within the soul.

Verses 3-5. "Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ," &c. These churches, though so sadly and dangerously shaken from their proper steadfastness, are yet greeted with the benediction which the Spirit gives to all who are in Christ. For a standing which is purely in the grace of God can be forfeited only by a deliberate renunciation of the truth of the gospel, or an habitual neglect on our parts of God's great salvation. Yet even in this greeting we may notice a characteristic variation from the ordinary form; for they who are thus addressed had indeed forgotten their first love, and wandered far from the beginning of their confidence. To recall them, therefore, from the perilous error of their way, and to reclaim their hearts from the usurpation of a most insidious and destructive vanity to the just dominion of His love

² Isa. ix. 18; Haggai ii. 13; 1 Cor. xv. 33.

who bought them by His blood, is the main purpose of the Spirit in this deeply interesting and invaluable letter.

Accordingly, the apostle's introductory words, which are usually few and simple, though laden with the weight of the great Name in which he writes, are here both elaborate and teeming with reproach. Before he greets them in the name of "our Lord Jesus Christ," he reminds them of the fact of His resurrection, and immediately afterwards explains to them the reason of His death. Were they, then, ignorant of these things? They had not always been; yet surely it was not by the light which such knowledge shed in upon their souls that they had found the strange path in which they were now desiring to walk. They had known indeed, but they had not *considered* what they knew. No rebuke could well be more pointed than his explanatory words; nor could any other form of speech convey with equal brevity and force to an awakened mind a fit sense both of the personal majesty and the self-devoting love of Him whose grace these sincere but most unwary sheep were so unworthily requiting.

He first reminds them that He whom they still acknowledged as their Lord was the Saviour also, who "gave Himself for our sins."³ The act of redemption and the personal grace of Him who wrought it are thus freshly and abruptly set before them at the outset, because it was that vital and fundamental

³ τοῦ δόντος ἑαυτὸν περὶ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν. The common but inferior reading is ὑπέρ. Our *sins* were the occasion of the Lord's self-sacrifice, but *ourselves* are the exchange of His redemption. He gave Himself because of our sins, but on behalf of His people and for their sakes.

doctrine that they were in such imminent danger of letting slip in their desire to add circumcision to their faith in Christ. The moral effect of their meddling with the law had been to turn their thoughts from Jesus to themselves ; to remind them in a wrong sense of the sin that was in their nature, and to set them on the vain task of self-justification, in strange and ruinous forgetfulness of Him who justifies as well as purchases His people by His blood. And now, dismissing for a while the Galatian Churches from our thoughts, let us weigh carefully on our own behalf the doctrine of the Spirit in verse 4.

The Lord Jesus Christ "*gave*," it is said, "*Himself* for *our sins*." The Giver, the gift, and its intent are here clearly and precisely specified. Not to enlarge now on the name and personal excellency of Him of whom these things are written, save as they necessarily discover themselves in the recital of His gracious acts, if it be asked, To whom or what did He give Himself? the answer is, To death, immediately and instrumentally, but really and finally to God ; since the Judge of sin could alone receive the just price of its remission. Observing, in the next place, the order of this precious declaration, we may note that we have here the counterpart of that more usual form of Gospel doctrine which sets the grace of the Father as the giver and sender of His only-begotten into the world in the more prominent place. But God was in Christ as well as with Him, and the Sufferer was the Word made flesh. When therefore with the same apostle we offer thanks to God for His unspeakable gift,⁴ let our hearts be not only on the

⁴ 2 Cor. ix. 15.

Father who sent forth and did not spare His own Son on account of sin, but on Him also “who *gave Himself* for our sins.”

In this respect the words now before us may be gainfully compared with other like declarations of the same witnessing Spirit.⁵ The essential glory of divine and eternal Sonship beams forth in its unclouded brightness from such testimonies. For what *creature* could thus give himself? Love is of God, and in its action manifests *Himself*. The incarnate and ever-blessed Son, who is the express image of His person, is the outshining of the Father’s glory; for the doing of whose will He came as the woman’s seed, a partaker of the children’s flesh and blood, into the world which He had made. Jehovah’s arm hath brought salvation to Him, and His own right hand hath gotten Him the victory.⁶ For sin’s sake and to please himself the earthy likeness of his Maker surrendered what he never could recover, when by his disobedience both he and his entire progeny became the spoil of death. Because of this first transgression, and of its innumerable repetitions on our parts, the Man who is from heaven took His place of sorrow upon earth, to give in love to us what none could ever take from Him, when, to redeem them that were His enemies by nature, He became obedient to death, even the death of the cross.⁷

⁵ Comp. 1 Tim. ii. 6; Tit. ii. 14; Heb. i. 3. A habit of dwelling too exclusively on the human side of the great mystery of godliness has in many instances resulted in a most perilous attenuation of the doctrine of atonement. The weakening and lowering effect of such half-gospel on the souls which feed upon it need not be here insisted on.

⁶ Isa. lix. 16; Ps. xcvi. 1. ⁷ John x. 18; Rom. v. 12-19.

But we must consider yet more closely the conditions of this marvellous trafficking of love. What Jesus gave was "Himself;" what He took, at that incomparable price, was remotely His Church, His people, the fulness of that heritage in earth and heaven which the just love of the Father has ordained for Him, whose name is "Worthy." But the reason of His gift, and therefore the immediate return for what He gave, was "our sins." The strict necessity of this strange, but ever-blessed, compact is declared categorically to our faith, but hidden from the search of our understanding in those deep mysteries of God which are not, and perhaps may never be, expounded clearly by His revealing Spirit to our minds. Be it ours rather to meditate adoringly the love which has thus wrought its holy pleasure, and to note for our comfort its resulting consequences to ourselves.

. First, it is entirely beyond dispute that, if the apostle's declaration be a true one, redemption is, for the believer, a thing absolutely and of necessity complete; since confessedly nothing of *ours*, good or bad, can compare in measure with what is *God's*. If the Son of God, therefore, gave Himself for our sins, then, by something more than the equality of justice, those sins have passed from our account. For, by a sacrificial transfer, He made them all His own, when, as His people's substitute, He took their burden on Himself. He was not made a *sinner* when He took our sins upon Himself. They were *ours* still, though laid no longer to our charge.⁸ God's Lamb was personally "separate from sinners" when

⁸ See further on this point the remarks on chap. iii. 13.

“made sin” for us. *Himself* bore *our* sins in His own body on the tree, when Jehovah laid on Him the iniquity of us all. *God* laid them there, and by our faith we put our hand and seal to His great work. Of the Son, it is witnessed that, “by Himself He purged our sins.” They were laid on Him when by the Eternal Spirit He offered Himself without spot to God, to be dealt with for our sakes as justice must needs deal with sin.⁹ And that strange work of judgment has been done. The sword, when called on to awake against Jehovah’s Fellow, did not tarry in its sheath. The Good Shepherd gave His life for the sheep when Christ suffered once for all for sins.¹ Let those, then, who confess believingly that Jesus is the Son of God learn to think thus of their sins, and what belongs to them, according to God’s own sure testimony, and not by the imperfect and always erroneous estimate of natural conscience. That sin is a thing most strange and evil, and that cannot be excused, we know without divine conviction.² That it is of such a nature as to be incapable of expiation or oblivion, except at the unmeasured cost of that great Sacrifice, that the ransom demanded has been paid, and that consequently, while more than ever guilty in our own eyes, we are blameless in the sight of Him who has accepted it, is a knowledge which the Holy Ghost alone can give. And joyfully, as well as faithfully, that blessed Spirit bears His witness of these things as He sheds abroad in the believer’s heart the knowledge, not only of the obliterating virtue and effect of the blood of the

⁹ Heb. i. 3, ix. 14. ¹ ἅπαξ περὶ ἁμαρτιῶν ἔπαθε. 1 Pet. iii. 18.

² Rom. i. 32.

everlasting Covenant, but of the love also which occasioned it to flow. Of the further results of this great act of grace I need not speak at present, since they will in large measure unfold themselves as we proceed. Let us rather consider awhile longer what is now before us in its practical bearing on the human soul.

For it is easily conceivable that this broad and distinct statement of the apostle may be accepted in all its forceful simplicity by some heart-exercised and Christ-seeking reader of these notes who may still ask doubtfully, How many are included in this enviable pronoun "our"? and dare I, who, by reason of a guilty and thoroughly wretched conscience, am a weary burden to myself, throw *my* sins under the covering shelter of that word? To this the Lord Himself, with the consenting acclaim of every true vessel of His grace, replies, You *may*. To save sinners was the purpose for which Christ came into the world, and to all who are weary of themselves His word is "Come to *me*." But unbelief has a perverse, yet persuasive logic of its own, whose first teacher is the father of lies, and by means of which the self-tormented heart evades and frustrates often the clearest testimonies of the Spirit to the grace and glory of Christ crucified. If the love of God is insisted on, and the breadth and fulness of a mercy which regards Jew and Gentile equally, it is objected that the elect only are saved; and the soul turns despondingly away from the one Object, which, by drawing to itself the hearts of God's true people, discovers their election by their faith, to seek vainly for evidences of God's choice within itself. Let such an one reflect that

what is set before us in the Gospel is not first our own election, but God's great salvation. To neglect the latter is to perish everlastingly; to embrace it gladly, and to hold it fast by cleaving with purpose of heart to the Saviour, is to be found also assuredly among God's elect.

It is to be always remembered that, while the saving grace of God is both absolute and distinctive, faith's power is appropriative. Of the man Christ Jesus it is written that He gave Himself a ransom for *all*. The advent in humiliation of the Son of God is the irrefragable token of divine love to *the world*. God's Lamb is provided for human transgressions and iniquities separately, as well as generally for the sin that is in the world. He is, as the obedient One, the personal equivalent, in the scales of God's just love, of SIN to the uttermost limit of that hateful term. He is this, but He is also more than this. Sin, which is the negation of righteousness, is met and ended sacrificially by the just and holy One who knew no sin. Now sin, though originating with the devil, is as respects its relation to redemption human in its form and measure; but the righteousness which, in grace to man, encounters and destroys it is not human only, but divine as well. Man died, but not man only, when the just One gave *Himself* for our sins. *Christ* died, who is both God and man. Hence the double source of comfort that is opened in the Gospel to the troubled soul. *Man* died for man. This proves to perfection sympathetic love of kind. The sacrificial victim was *the eternal Son of God*. This gives assurance of a power equal to the love of Him who tells us that He

came to seek and save the lost. He that speaks in righteousness is mighty also, in his own sufficiency, to save.³

Now, as to the application of this, it is certain that all true believers are elect of God; and that none come really to the Son without the drawing of the Father.⁴ But the manner of the Father's drawing is according to the actual condition of those on whom His word takes hold. Hence the large and expressive vocabulary of names and descriptive operations which the Spirit applies in Scripture to the Lord. "Bread" is for the hungry; "light," for those in darkness; "deliverance," for captives; "cleansing," for the filthy; grace and pitying kindness, for the destitute and the unworthy, &c. And as we look more closely at the record which God gives us of His Son, we find, as we might well expect to find, that He is ever thinking deeper than ourselves. We cry out when awakened, and are amazed at ourselves and our sins. He fathoms *sin* to its extreme, and provides for its abolition according to His perfect understanding both of its nature and its power. As the God of ALL grace, He can pardon us absolutely, because that which is our torment and dishonour He has already visited and done away in Christ. For He made Him to be sin for us. Does a man feel, as the apostle felt, that he is "carnal, sold under sin"? *Redemption* is for him. Does shame fill his face and bitterness his spirit, as he communes with himself and is not still? Let him remember that Christ died for *the ungodly*, and was confounded at the burden which, as our substitute, He took upon Him-

³ Isa. lxiii. 1.

⁴ Col. iii. 12; John vi. 44.

self,⁵ and he will confess, out of a broken but rejoicing heart, that blessed One whom his sins and their prospective penalties so sore amazed⁶ to be indeed his glory and the lifter up of his head.⁷ In one word, let the doubting spirit learn to still and mock his natural fears by melodies of praise to Him who hath *not* dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.⁸ Let him learn to submit himself, not to the dominion of his own imaginations, but to the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ. Let his thoughts be engaged with his Saviour, and no longer with himself. God's voice demands our obedience, and His commandment by the Gospel is, that we believe not in our own badness merely, but much more in His goodness, in the name and saving grace of Him who gave Himself for our sins.

The apostle, in addressing his words to those whom he had once known as believers, though in his absence from them they had wavered in their faith, begins his letter of exhortation by thus claiming a common interest with themselves in the redeeming grace of Christ. He gave Himself, he says, for *our* sins. In Him is no sin; but what He did and suffered, and what He is personally worth, is the answer on behalf of all believers to the accusations of an evil conscience and the just claims of their Creator's outraged will. For if it be true that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, it is not less true that all who believe are justified freely by His grace, through the redemption which is in Christ

⁵ Ps. lxi. 5, 6.

⁶ Mark xiv. 33.

⁷ Ps. iii. 3.

⁸ Ps. ciii. 10-12.

Jesus.⁹ Let none, therefore, who may read these words with a longing desire to share personally in the grace and peace which are "from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ," doubt any longer that his or her sins are here fully and finally accounted for. The very essence of the Gospel or good news of God is the call which it makes on every hearing ear to believe that the burden, which was naturally all our own, has passed from us for ever to the Lord. Let it never be out of our remembrance that Christ crucified is personally *the Truth*. Any impressions, therefore, which may yet remain on our minds at variance with this testimony to His self-devoting love and its effect, are false impressions, which it would be sin any longer to entertain. For the sin of all sins, in the present day of mercy and long-suffering goodness, is the sin of unbelief.¹

Proceeding now with the apostle's words, we are next told that this incomparable act of the Lord's love to *us* was wrought for a definite purpose, and in contemplation of results not only remote and everlasting, but immediate and temporal also. We are assured moreover that the gracious lover of our souls was actuated in the doing of His work of mercy by a devotion of another and a higher kind. For it was done "that He might deliver us from the present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father." It was in answer to no conscious cry of our own that Jesus came, but at the bidding of a love which thought its thoughts of kindness to us while we lay as lifeless aliens in our sins. But if His delights were ever with the sons of men, His very meat was

⁹ Rom. iii. 23-25.

¹ Heb. iii. 12; x. 38, 39.

to do the will of Him that sent Him, and to end *His* work.¹

The first thing to be noticed in considering these words is, that the intent and proper effect of gospel grace are here so stated as to put it in direct contrast to the former ministration under which the Galatians, in their ignorance of its true nature, were desiring to place themselves. For the law was not given to separate the circumcision from the world, nor was Moses sent to lead God's people to a heavenly inheritance, though both to him and to as many other of the circumcision as possessed the faith of God's elect the earthly Canaan was itself but a promise of a better and heavenly country yet to come. The law, if Israel kept it, should determine their position of preëminence, and ensure their abundant blessing in this present world,² but had no tendency to free or separate them from it. For such was not the purpose of Jehovah when He took Him a nation from among a nation by a mighty hand, and bare them on eagles' wings unto Himself.³ Earth and time, and things of sight and touch and perishable use, were Israel's inheritance, though the people were to dwell alone. There is moreover a "world to come" of which the Spirit also speaks, when the age now passing shall have run its course—a world into which the now hidden Christ shall a second time be brought, to fulfil, with His ransomed and then glorified Church, the promised age of the creation's rest. Of this time of sublunary peace and blessing, when righteousness should reign and wickedness should be abased, the

¹ Prov. viii. 31; John iv. 34.

² Deut. iv. 5-9.

³ Deut. iv. 34; Exodus xix. 4, *seq.*

words of Moses and of all God's holy prophets testified.⁴ But neither lawgiver nor prophet weaned the heart of Israel from earth, nor spoke of the world as Christ's apostles do. It was not to them an irremediably evil thing, from which deliverance must be had before God's people could be owned of Him. But such was and is the will of Him who now reveals Himself in Christ as our *Father* as well as our God.⁵

The character of the "present evil world, or age,"⁶ was pronounced definitively by the Spirit of truth when, as the Messenger and Witness of the rejected Son of man, He empowered Christ's apostles to begin at Jerusalem the preaching of the gospel of reconciliation. That age must needs be evil in the Father's eyes which filled the measure of its iniquity by crucifying, in its godless ignorance, His own eternal Son, the Lord of glory. It is self-convinced of evil by its rejection of incarnate goodness. Now this world is the native place of all God's children, and they find themselves its captives, and seek emancipation from it, only when awakened by the voice of truth to a right sense of its character in the sight of God. And as by a prophet God brought His earthly people out of Egypt,⁷ so by Him of whom His prophets spake He now brings His children from under the thralldom of the present evil world. Deliverance

⁴ Heb. i. 6 (margin), ii. 5; Rom. viii. 19-21.

⁵ *Notes on 1 Corinthians*, chap. viii. 6.

⁶ ἐκ τοῦ αἰῶνος τοῦ ἐνεστώτος. The "present evil age" is also, by another description, the "day of man;" and stands in contrast, first, with the soon-coming "day of the Lord," and, secondly, with those "ages of ages" which form, in their eternal cycle, the great "day of God" for which faith looks and longs, as for its never-ending rest and joy. (2 Peter iii. 12-14.)

⁷ Hosea xii. 13.

then from such a world implies two things; first, a complete clearance of ourselves, through the redeeming grace of God, from the guilt which gives to it its evil character; and, secondly, an entire reconciliation, both forensically and in *heart*, to Him who has received up into glory His world-rejected Son.⁸ The faith which livingly unites believers to the Lord is the means, first, of their justification by His precious blood, and then of their personal acceptance in His name, the quickening and energizing power of the Holy Ghost being the vitally efficient spring of that great work of God which makes believers what they are as the elect and acknowledged vessels of His mercy; Himself being moreover the seal, and earnest, and divine anointing, which rests now on all who know the Father in the Son. They are delivered from the present evil age, because delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son.⁹ These things will receive a fuller consideration further on; the point to be here distinctly noticed is the sovereignty of God as it manifests itself in the effectual calling of His Church. It is *according to His will* that deliverance, not from the wrath to come only, but from this present evil world, should result in His people from their reception of His saving truth. .

“The will of God”—the originating power which fulfils its purpose, first absolutely, by the obedience of Jesus Christ, and then electively through the agency of a consenting faith on our parts¹—is here, as always, confessed and glorified as the reason of His children's hope. Now that will is the *sanctification*

⁸ 2 Cor. v. 12, 20.

⁹ Col. i. 13.

¹ John vi. 38-40.

as well as the redemption of His chosen.² Hence the force of the apostle's language at all times in its practical intent, and hence also its peculiar emphasis on the present occasion. For the Galatians were, as we shall see presently, contradicting and opposing in the highest sense the will of God (although unconscious of the nature of their sin), by abandoning themselves to the delusion which led them to seek the way of peace and holiness by a change from the Spirit to the letter, and turned them from the grace which saved them to the deceitful plausibilities of that fatal law of works which is the very strength of sin. If glory is to redound for ever in the Church, as it most surely will, to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, it must be by other means than this. Let us note too that the brief doxology contained in verse 5 relates not to the Father only, though it stands in a more immediate relation to that name, but also to the Son. Its double object is presented to us in verse 3. Glory is evermore commensurate with *grace*; and as both grace and peace flow in the Spirit's benediction, not from the Father only, but in like manner from the Son, so glory returns to God and to the Lamb alike, from those who worship in the Spirit; to Him who gave Himself for our sins, no less than to Him who did not spare His own Son for our sakes.

Verse 6. "I marvel that ye are so soon removing³ from him that called you," &c. Their state is depicted faithfully but without exaggeration in these words. They were not yet apostates from the faith, but were entering on a change which, if persisted in, would

² Col. i. 9; 1 Peter i. 14, 15; iv. 2. ³ μετατίθεσθε.

surely sever them from Christ.⁴ Paul's wonder at the swift defection of these churches is proportioned to his own deep and heartfelt appreciation and enjoyment of the grace of God. To one who knew as he did, in the fulness of an experimental conviction, the opposite principles of law and grace, and who counted all things loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord, whose heart moreover had so recently been warmed into exultant thankfulness on account of these Galatians as he witnessed their delighted acceptance of his message,⁵ the spectacle of this sad declension from their high and holy standing as partakers of Christ, to the low and unblessed state of legal bondage, may well have seemed a thing both wonderful and horrible.⁶ They were indeed, like Israel of old, committing two evils, in turning from the living waters of the Spirit's testimony, to place themselves at men's bidding under ordinances which, though dead by a legitimate fulfilment to all who knew the grace of God in truth, were as an active power of destruction to as many as mistook them for the word of life. For this was no question of measures or degrees, nor of a preference of one form of pure doctrine to the neglect of another. Not Paul, nor Cephas, nor Apollos, but *God Himself*, who calls His people by His messengers through the quickening power of His gospel, is the slighted party in this case. By opening their ears to legal teaching, they were turning unconsciously away from Him who speaks no longer upon earth and by His servant Moses who is dead, nor by the prophets who lived

⁴ *Infra*, chap. v. 4.

⁵ *Infra*, chap. iv. 15.

⁶ *Conf. Jer. ii. 13; v. 31.*

only to bear witness to the vanity of legal hopes, and to point to a new and living covenant to come, but by His very Son from heaven. From Him who called them "in (or by) the grace of Christ"⁷ they were being moved by the allurements of "a *different* gospel."⁸ But the gospel which the Spirit ministers is, as he has elsewhere affirmed, the power of God unto salvation to every believer.⁹ If they gave therefore their attention to another ministry, which wrought effectually only through their unbelief, it would show itself in the end, to all who abode in their delusions, to be the power of Satan to destruction.

Verse 7. "Which is not *another*,"¹ &c. As if he felt it a desecration of the word "gospel," to use it thus in a comparative sense, he hastens to re-assert for God's "glad tidings" the singular distinction which belongs to it. Other gospel than His own there cannot be. For as none in earth or heaven is comparable with the Lord, so the word which bears Him witness can be spoken effectually only by Himself. The doctrine which these raveners of the flock were bringing in was not a second *gospel*, to those who knew its meaning, for it brought no gladness in its sound. Neither joy nor peace could come through a ministry which turned them from their Saviour to themselves. Professing to lead the Galatian converts further than the elementary teaching which they had received from Paul, by superadding to the word which he preached to them as Gentiles an initiation into the knowledge which was Israel's peculiar boast, they were both troubling souls which God had once

⁷ ἐν χάριτι Χριστοῦ. "Into" is scarcely a justifiable translation.

⁸ εἰς ἕτερον εὐαγ.

⁹ Rom. i. 16.

¹ ἄλλο.

quieted with His own sure peace by Jesus Christ, and were desiring, as the effect of their teachings, to give to Christ's gospel a new and altogether foreign sense.² Of these two results of erroneous teaching, the latter is in every way the most evil and injurious: it is at this therefore that the apostle levels the strong denunciations contained in the verses which immediately follow.

But before considering these, it seems necessary to turn for a while from the Galatians to ourselves, and to take a brief survey of the spirit and temper of our own times with reference to the true gospel of God. Two principal and opposing forms of unbelief are now, as when the incarnate Word first showed Himself to Israel, contending against the living truth of God. Human tradition, with an unhallowed and sensuous ritualism, is opposed by a modern Sadduceeism which, like its rival, admits of many shades and varieties of false religious thought. The latter is the stronger of these evil powers since it more directly and naturally allies itself to the restless and man-exalting spirit of the age; but the former is prevailing, as spiritual harlotry ever has prevailed, wherever it obtains as its material a religious temperament unaccompanied by a genuine and subject faith.³ Music and vestments and processions charm

² μεταστρέψαι.

³ By this expression I distinguish that which is God's true gift, and the mark of His elect, which submits to His righteousness, and worships only in the Spirit—from the vain and empty faith which stays itself *remotely* on doctrinal facts and histories, but immediately and practically on observances and habits of a merely human origin. There are doubtless living souls involved in the many forms of Satan's lie which deceives the whole world; and such will surely be delivered, as Lot was out of Sodom, by Him

the sense, and act powerfully on the natural man; while sacerdotal pretensions, though an utter lie against Christ's glory and the testimony of the Holy Ghost,⁴ have now, as they have ever had, a welcome fascination for the helpless human conscience, until it is enlightened by the true light of the gospel. Eventually ritualism will (it may be inferred from Scripture) change its object. As yet it honours outwardly, while really it insults, the living God. But it is a false thing essentially, and will, with all other falsehoods, give itself finally to the Beast, when in the dreadful progress of the day of man the desecration of divine truth, through a systematic corrupting of the written word, shall pass on to its final stage of positive apostasy from God.⁵ Now the great end of the inspired writing in our hands is to impress on the minds of all true believers the absolute incompatibility of what is merely human with that which is divine, in all that relates to the knowledge, the worship, and the service of the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Spirit is *truth*, and whatever, in religious doctrine or observance, is not of the Spirit is neither truth nor true. Tradition is not of the Spirit, beyond the limits of His own inspired word. Apostles have delivered to us what we are to hold and keep; to be mindful, therefore, of their charge, and of the words spoken

who knoweth how. What believers have to remember is that Christian ritualism is *not of God*. Jewish ritualism was so originally, but had to be refused by Him who had ordained it, because it failed to be what modern imitators of Judaism would have us imagine it to be in their far wiser hands—a help and guide to faith. (Isa. i. 13, *seq.*; Amos v. 21, *seq.*)

⁴ Notes on the Hebrews, *passim*.

⁵ Rev. xvii. 13–18.

before of the holy prophets, is for those who seek the way of truth the sole condition of a safe and upright walk.⁶ But the Church has no authoritative or didactic rights or powers in herself, and can in nowise be a law unto herself. She is subject to the Lord, who is her ever present guide and teacher by the Spirit, according to the gracious and varied working of His will. She edifies herself through her submission to her Head, and as she feeds in the rich pasture of His love.⁷ In the words which we are presently to consider, we have an example of the tone and feeling of a man full of the Holy Ghost in the presence of false doctrinal intrusions into the fold of Christ—a tone and feeling in entire keeping with that of his Divine Master, when weighing and pronouncing judgment on the liars and evil-workers of Jerusalem.⁸ If we would have praise in the coming day from Him who is both the Saviour and the righteous Judge, we must strive so to walk in communion with Him as to see things with His eyes, and cultivate a like spirit with His own.⁹

Verse 8. “But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you,” &c. There is a startling solemnity of meaning in the form of words which Paul here employs that should claim our serious attention. God only is without change. Even apostles might unsay their former words, and the epistle we are now considering affords, as we shall soon see,¹ a notable example of apostolic tergiversation. For it is grace, and not communicated gift, that alone preserves the footsteps of God’s saints. One

⁶ 2 Peter iii. 2. ⁷ Eph. iv. 11–16. ⁸ Matt. xxiii.

⁹ 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8. ¹ *Infra*, chap. ii. 11, *seq.*

who had preached to others might become a reprobate, and would do so if not kept by the power of God through faith. Yet though this was possible, it was in a high degree improbable. An inspired herald of the gospel, an ambassador of Christ, was of all men the least likely to revoke his words or contradict himself. And herein lies the force and propriety of this appeal. Corrupters of the word there were already not a few,² and these would be multiplied as time rolled on. Of them, therefore, let his brethren beware, but not of them only. To distinguish truth from error is a faculty belonging to all who are of God. For His children have an unction from the Holy One.³ But faculties need exercise, and duty demands watchfulness. If we are habitually gathering and living on the true manna, we shall instinctively become aware of any deviation from sound doctrine on the part of our teachers. Love's ears are critical when the Beloved is the subject of men's speech. It is when our hearts are sleeping that our ears are dull. None are excused from this duty of discernment, nor are any of God's ministers excepted from its operation. Paul must himself be judged by his own words, and neither his official dignity, nor the tender tie of spiritual relationship, must be allowed to blind the conscience of his brethren, or influence their judgment in their estimate of what he taught.

But more; an angel out of heaven might conceivably repeat the sin of those who kept not their first estate, and become a slanderer of Him by the word of whose power angels are themselves upheld. The apostle is not rhapsodizing when he thus expresses

² 2 Cor. ii. 17.

³ 1 John ii. 20, 21.

his alarm. Angels have sinned, and may again transgress. The saints shall judge angels in the day of Christ.⁴ The possibilities of sin are known to God only, and with its probabilities we have less concern than with the certainty that all unrighteousness is sin, and that no creature is self-sustaining nor exempt from the peril of apostasy, when considered apart from its Creator. The elect angels are preserved from falling by the same Almighty arm which is ere long to bring within the circle of their bright and multitudinous array the Church of the first-born who now walk by faith.⁵

The point of this verse is that *God* speaks, and not man, in the record which He hath given of His Son. The gospel is the voice of the eternal Spirit, bearing witness to the truth as it is objectively revealed to us in Jesus Christ. To utter, therefore, in the name of God (and it cannot be too often repeated, or too solemnly remembered, that *all* professedly Christian teaching has truly or falsely this character) words which vary in their intent from that which He has said, is to deny Him in the very fountain of His holiness, and to make His name a shelter for a lie. And if personal acceptance and the fulness of all blessing be the covenanted end of the obedience of faith, a curse is assuredly the fit recompence of those who make the word of grace of none effect. Unbelief, when it finds its expression in the methodized opposition of self-righteousness, calls the Lord of life "Anathema."⁶ By a just retribution, therefore, they who in the spirit of their minds love cursing rather than confession of the truth, must have the

⁴ 1 Cor. vi. 3.

⁵ Rev. v. 11.

⁶ 1 Cor. xii. 3.

weight of the Spirit's malediction fastened on themselves, both now and in the world to come.

Verse 9. "As we said before, so now I say again," &c. Reiteration, and it is often used in Scripture, proves both the earnestness of him who speaks, and the value in his eyes of what he says. And in reading these passionate declarations we should well remember that the words and sentiment alike are of *the Lord*. The curse of an apostle is as harmless as a pope's, if uttered merely on the motion of his own excited feelings. But Paul's words when written to the churches were his own no longer, but the Lord's.⁷ It is as if by a double Amen the living door of safety⁸ closed itself against the presumptuous expectations of all who choose a lie for their confidence instead of God's revealed and living truth. There is, besides, more than a repetition in this verse; it differs in a slight degree in its object from the former, which relates to the preaching of another gospel only, while here its reception also is in contemplation. The Galatians had received Paul's gospel as the word of God, and were thus witnesses against themselves to the truth of his apostolic claims, the Spirit also bearing witness, and by outward miracles confirming what he said.⁹ Let them bear these things in mind, and hold fast what they had received, lest their hope of glory should be turned to shame. Let them beware of divers and strange doctrines, and of the false claims of the concision. But the curse is in either case reserved, as of old, for the deceiver, not for the deceived.¹

⁷ 1 Cor. xiv. 37.

⁸ John x. 9.

⁹ *Infra*, chap. iii. 2-5.

¹ Gen. iii. 14.

Verse 10. "For do I now persuade men, or God?" &c. It is the voice of a self-conscious steward of God's mysteries that is heard in these remarkable words, and we may compare them, with a view to a better apprehension of their meaning, with his language upon other occasions when speaking of his ministry.² The end and study of his life was to approve himself to God a workman that needed not to be ashamed; but to persuade God of his fidelity, as His messenger and witness, Paul must keep close in his testimony to the *words* of God. There had been a time when he persuaded *men*, and served with an unflagging zeal the traditions of his fathers after the flesh; but that time had passed, and was, with the fruitless and unblessed labour which it witnessed, among the things behind. He lives *now* for another end.³ With him the preaching of the gospel was not a voluntary choice, but an imposed responsibility. It was undertaken by him, not on the spur of a self-seeking ambition, but in the con-

² 1 Thess. ii. 4, 5; 2 Cor. v. 9.

³ There is an emphasis in this "now," followed, as it presently is, by "yet," which seems to refer partly to his antecedent personal history as a Jew, and partly to the false insinuations of the "ministers of Satan," as he elsewhere calls them, who were beguiling the Galatian saints. To misrepresent Paul in all ways was their constant endeavour; and it is not unlikely, as has been suggested by others, that an effort had been made to persuade the Galatians that his silence as to Moses was dictated by a desire on his part to keep them, for ends of his own, in a state of tutelage, instead of admitting them, as *they* proposed to do, to the higher and full privileges of the circumcision. Nothing is too base to be imagined, nor too gross to be believed, when the object of the enemy is to corrupt the faith, and his dupes have been once withdrawn, in the habit of their souls, from immediate communion with the Lord.

straining power of the love of Christ. Men were indeed his aim, but not their suffrages as men. He sought them as a fisher for their souls, and the net with which he plied his craft was not worldly wisdom, but the grace of God. As of sincerity, as of God and in the sight of God, he spake in Christ as an anointed minister of grace.⁴ How well or ill he sped in his vocation, and what measure of success attended his efforts to please God, will be known completely only in the day of God; but of the true character of his ministry, as it respected men, both they who heard him, and ourselves who meditate his written words, are equally competent to judge.

There is a weighty and sad significance in what he tells us as to this. Others, he well knew, were seeking to please men, and by their too successful practisings were in danger of ruining both their disciples and themselves. But such had at no time been the manner of Paul. The work which he was working was the fulfilling of the word and will of God. Pleasure indeed of the highest and the only lasting, as well as worthy kind, invariably followed the reception of his message. But was that pleasure of a natural kind? Was self-satisfaction the same thing, or had it even anything in common with the joy of God's salvation? The quality of his doctrine must determine his acceptance as a teacher among men. But one whose fixed resolution was to know nothing among those to whom he spoke, but Jesus Christ and Him crucified, could look for no favourable hearing from the world which crucified Him. If to be "despised and rejected of men" was the Master's

⁴ 2 Cor. ii. 17.

necessity, because of the contrariety of light to darkness, the preaching of the cross must also be unwelcome and despicable in the eyes of unregenerate men. To the Jew it is a stumbling-block, and to the Gentile foolishness, while in their natural state. If accepted, therefore, by either Jew or Gentile, it is because both one and the other are brought first to despair of what is proper to themselves. The Jew who, with a soul awakened to the true nature of his standing, trembles at the hopeless weight of legal responsibility, and the Gentile, to whom the Spirit of truth has shown the utter vanity of his idolatrous confidence or his philosophic dreams, turn with an equal readiness of heart to Him who came to seek and save the lost.

The secret of popular ministry is the flattery, occult or open, of those who are addressed. Men are pleased or displeased according as they are or are not the chief object of complacent attention to themselves. The seeker of his own righteousness takes a delusive pleasure in his search, and listens with a willing ear to teaching which keeps before his view the false hope upon which his heart is set. The philosopher, the mere voluptuary, or the ardent votary of science, will give ready attention to any kind of speech that does not disallow the ruling passion of their souls. And men will bear much from one another in the way of hostile declamation, without any serious risings of displeasure, so long as the censor's appeals are from man only to man—from a neglected and abused self to the same self in a higher tone and worthier estate. But a doctrine which not only sets men's faults and weaknesses and vices in a

new and intolerable light, but absolutely disallows *all* works of will, condemning the pleasures of the flesh and mind alike, and declaring all mankind to be not defective only and imperfect, but positively guilty in the sight of God, and which confounds and silences self-righteousness by proving it to be the chief of sins, while it calls men universally to flee from certainly impending wrath to a shelter entirely apart from and above themselves, can be welcomed only by those ears which God has Himself opened to receive His words. The alluring loveliness of Christ shines vainly for the unregenerate heart. They only who are themselves "of God" hear willingly, because with understanding, the voices of His messengers.⁵ Extensive popularity in the present evil world can never be the lot of a true servant of his Lord.⁶

To note further, out of many, a few only of the more obvious causes of the necessary unpopularity of the gospel when preached in the true power of God. Humiliation is not pleasing, but the doctrine of the cross casts down the loftiness of men. Disappointment is a thing most hateful to mankind, but the word of God destroys as a devouring fire all hopes that rest on any other reason than itself. Contempt cannot gratify a nature that is full of pride, but the gospel pours contempt upon the very things which men most dearly prize. Contradiction is never palatable to a mind that naturally seeks its own; but truth, when the Spirit speaks it, utterly denies the thoughts and crosses all the purposes of men, allowing no place to the disputer, and turning to

⁵ 1 John iv. 6.

⁶ John xv. 19, 20.

foolishness the wisdom of the wise. Alas ! that love itself, so unupbraiding in its holiness, so rich and unimaginable in its grace, which God commends now to His creatures in the gospel of His Son, is not indifferent only but hateful also to a generation that seeks not God, but finds pleasure in unrighteousness ! Men *saw* and hated, when both light and love were visible and palpable in Jesus, as He walked and wrought upon this earth ; men *hear*, and for the most part turn away from those who seek to set plainly before their souls the record which God has given of His Son in the word of His own saving grace.⁷

In clearing his own soul, by recording thus his solemn disclaimer of all human approbation as a slave of Christ, he denounces by anticipation that sad aspect of the same "evil world" which is now in these latter days presented to our contemplation, when men should be "lovers of their own selves," without hating Christianity in its altered type ; and when the offence of the cross should cease, not by its effectual conquest of men's hearts, but because its power and true meaning were neutralized and dissipated through the sleight of men. No eye which God has opened can fail to read some at least of the manifold evidences of a fatal dereliction of the way of truth which marks this age. Chief among these is the false deference continually paid to *number* on the part of those who claim to lead the minds of men. The pleasure of the million is the professed aim of most of the modern guides of thought, not a few of whom are self-styled, though falsely, ministers of God. Errors of all forms find ready listeners

⁷ John xv. 22-24.

among those who continue to name, and outwardly profess to love and reverence, the name of Christ. "They are of the world; therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them."⁸ Yet they do not fear to utter their own imaginations in His name. But the foundation of God standeth sure,⁹ and will both confound all contradiction and sustain victoriously the hope which true faith builds upon it. Paul had a loftier and surer aim than popularity; and that he pleased God was attested not less distinctly by his persecutions and afflictions for the gospel's sake, than by his marvellous success as a true preacher of His word. May his declaration and example be as a safeguard and incentive to as many as the Lord may call to labour in His vineyard in the cloudy evening of this day of grace!

Verse 11. "But I certify you, brethren," &c. The subsequent corrupting of their minds through the infusion of false human teachings, and the laboured efforts of their treacherous guides to depreciate Paul's ministry through an invidious comparison of his late-born claims to the apostolate with those of the original disciples, made it needful for him to reassert thus formally the genuineness and divine origin of that gospel which had once been its own witness to their gladdened hearts, and had to others testified its source by its effects. It is not *after man*, is his assurance both to them and us.¹ These words are to be taken by us in their amplest sense. *God's* gospel, or message of good news to men, has in it no originally human element at all. It is the manifestation to the world of a God whom no man hath seen at any time, and

⁸ 1 John iv. 5. ⁹ 2 Tim. ii. 16-19. ¹ *Infra*, chap. iv. 14, 15.

whom neither Israel nor the Gentiles knew in truth, until the revelation of the Father in the Son as the unsparing Judge of sin, yet the ready Saviour of the lost. While regarding therefore man as its object, it excludes him and his works alike from its consideration as an originating or even a naturally concurring party in any sense. The thoughts of man are in its estimation vanity; his promises, a lie. It is a *new thing*, though in fulfilment of His earliest counsel, that God now reveals from heaven, and it is greeted by a new song on the part of His elect. Type and promise had prepared their hearts for the arrival of good things from God, while their souls languished meanwhile under the burden of a right, and therefore an unhappy, conscience in themselves, when measured by the law, which was at once their admiration and their dread.² But that Jehovah whom they knew to be their Judge should Himself take His own sentence against sin upon Himself, and make the mighty stream of His own righteousness wash clean away the evidence of human guilt, Himself also becoming by His quickening Spirit a well of living water in the hearts of His believing people, and showing them objectively in the person of His glorified and ever-blessed Christ their new and unalterable title and assurance of eternal life; all this was light indeed, to be marvelled at and rejoiced in by the eyes that saw it, but it was neither an intuitive conception of man nor even accessible to his natural heart or mind. Contained in the scriptures, which prophesied from the beginning the sufferings of Christ and the glories which should follow, but an unuttered mystery until

² Psalm cxix. *passim*.

the time appointed came, it is now made known by the preaching of Jesus Christ, as His own message of glad tidings to the nations, by the commandment of the everlasting God.³ And as with the essential nature of the gospel, so was it with the apostle's own commission as an anointed preacher of the faith.

Verse 12. "For *I* neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ." The emphatic use of this pronoun should be noticed. Others had done so, but not he. Paul had indeed been long inured to discipleship, and at the feet of Gamaliel had received with avidity all that tradition could impart of truth. But although as a receiver of Jewish tradition he knew Christ after the flesh,⁴ he knew not, until taught it from above, that *Jesus* was the Christ. His *Gospel* did not come to him from man. There were apostles before him, but he did not learn of them; for to the moment of his miraculous conversion he had been their bitterest and deadliest foe. He was not taught it; for all human teaching on the subject he had held in the angriest contempt; while in his zealous and self-satisfied ignorance of God he spake vehemently against what he did not know, and spared no effort to destroy the truth which had since through grace become his boast. Nor as a believer and an apostle of the faith did he owe anything to human teaching. That which he had received and learnt he had direct from God by a personal revelation of the Lord of glory. No doubt what he now writes on this subject had been told before to these Galatians. And was it likely, they should ask themselves, that a doctrine thus imparted from on

³ Rom. xvi. 25, 26.

⁴ Notes on 2 Corinthians, v. 16.

high was less than perfect in its terms, or that, the precious faith of God having once been delivered to them in His gospel, there remained yet other sources of divine illumination from whence souls which had begun with *Christ* could afterwards be more completely filled? Such a question would have spontaneously occurred to their minds, and received a prompt and decisive answer from their hearts, had they nursed their early faith on the sincere milk of the word instead of taking for their guidance the insidious reasonings of men.⁵ Discretion also should have preserved them from listening too readily, and as they now find hurtfully, to a stranger's voice; but more especially their personal knowledge of him who first brought to them the gospel of God should have effectually secured them from the danger into which they had so inconsiderately fallen. This is forcibly conveyed to us in what immediately follows.

Verses 13, 14. "For ye heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion;" &c. Their previous information on these things was, we may almost certainly assume, imparted to them by himself, and in considering his present statements it is interesting to notice the order in which they are made. The chief, and always the uppermost, of his recollections is his former conduct as a persecutor of the Church. The motive which produced it is to be

⁵ Though we should remember that their faultiness in this respect bears no comparison with that of any who now turn from God to man. *We* have the *whole* word of God, of which they had a part only, and probably a scanty part, though the presence and activity among them of miraculous spiritual energies should have confirmed their faith and kept them from being moved from their first hope. *Infra*, chap. iii. 5.

found in the after assertion of his Pharisaic proficiency and zeal. Paul preached not himself, but in preaching Christ he found fit place for mentioning the chief parts of his personal history, since no stronger or more convincing illustration could be set before the hearts and consciences of men of the great principle, that "the long-suffering of the Lord is salvation,"⁶ than the call of this chief of persecutors to the very first rank of God's chosen ambassadors of grace. Besides, even when his own lips were silent on these things, few ears were altogether unacquainted with his fame. Go where he might, some rumour of him would be sure to follow, if it did not go before him. He was, as he has elsewhere told us, both "unknown and well known."⁷

Such things had been told concerning Paul to the Galatians. Yet, strange to say, they failed to discover in these solemn and notorious facts a ready and emphatic exposure of the delusion to which they were so easily surrendering themselves. For what was it that had fed the fierce flame of Saul's anti-Christian zeal, but the very Judaism which these thoughtless and unstable sheep were welcoming as a precious addition to their faith? As a Jew he had persecuted and wasted the Church of God, and this they knew; yet they who had received Christ's gospel from his lips were eagerly desiring to be circumcised! As a preacher of the Gospel, he had led them forth from their natural darkness and idolatrous ignorance of God into the bright light of His living glory in the face of Jesus Christ; yet they were now calling earnestly for the law of condemnation, and the minis-

⁶ 2 Pet. iii. 15.⁷ 2 Cor. vi. 9.

try of death! We may reasonably marvel that they did not ask themselves in what Paul differed from their later teachers in respect of legal knowledge, save that what they professed to teach he understood with far more thoroughness than they. For, as a disciple of tradition, they knew, and should have remembered, that he had surpassed most of his competitors of equal age, while he excelled them all in conscientious intensity of zeal and unsparing personal devotedness. What others were content to know, he practised also; for with him to tolerate in a spirit of indifference what he believed to be against the truth, was a thing morally impossible. If he hated the Gospel and wasted the Church of God, it was because, as he avowed before his judges, "he thought verily with himself that he *ought* to do many things contrary to Jesus of Nazareth."⁸

Verse 15. "But when it pleased God," &c. From the natural will and conscience which had so exemplified their vain and unhallowed energies in this single-minded persecutor of the faith, we turn now to contemplate the source of the new and entirely contrary spirit and principle which governed and sustained him as an apostle of Jesus Christ. The first thing to be noticed is his direct and solemnly impressive reference of all to the supreme will and power of God. "It pleased God." We listen here to the voice of the new creature acknowledging and giving glory to its Maker.⁹ As a Christian apostle and minister of God, both himself and his doctrine are distinctively "of God." The new wine must be put into a new bottle, and the patched and insufficient web of

⁸ Acts xxvi. 9. ⁹ Eph. ii. 10; 2 Cor. v. 17, 18.

legal works be first replaced by the durable clothing of "the righteousness which is of God by faith," before the lips which once breathed threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, and blasphemed unsparingly that worthy name, could be opened to show forth His praise. Tried, sifted, and confronted with the God whom he professed to know, his own righteousness assessed at its proper value and discovered to be sin, Paul had to listen no longer to the deceitful tones of a deluded and self-flattering conscience, but to the voice of the Almighty, which breaks at will the cedars of Lebanon, and bends to its purpose at the fitting season the harder sinew of self-righteous obstinacy and unbelief.¹

Two things have here to be distinguished: the original separation of Paul from his mother's womb, and his subsequent calling by the grace of God. Like his prophetic predecessor and fellow-servant, he was in an especial manner born for God,² and all his earlier training had been cast providentially in a form which, when the proper season came, should prove to have been the most efficient preparation of God's chosen vessel for the singular and highly honoured destiny to which he had been fore-ordained. For it is characteristic of true Christian ministry, as distinguished from that of the earlier prophets, that what God's ministers now speak, they speak out of the fulness of a heart in which Christ dwells, and therefore with the full concurrence of their spiritual understanding, and not merely on the compulsion of the Holy Ghost. They are moved, indeed, and governed by the self-same Spirit, but they are en-

¹ Ps. xxix. 5; Isa. xlviii. 4. ² Jer. i. 5.

lightened by Him also. He is the revealer to their souls of that which He kept concealed, partly or entirely, from His earlier witnesses. The darkness is past and the true light now shineth. Subjective knowledge and assurance are the very fountain of their speech. They speak as the oracles of God, but in full communion with the truth which is the burden of their utterance. They are not mad, though God's words of truth and soberness may startle and amaze the natural ear.³ The heart in which God's living wisdom has His dwelling is the teacher of their lips.⁴ That Paul, therefore, might become an able minister of "the Spirit," he must first learn thoroughly and experimentally the force and meaning of the letter.⁵ To plead convincingly the claims of Christ, he must have a perfect knowledge both of Moses and of those who professed to be his sound interpreters; and, as the chief setter forth of the doctrine of pure grace, it was fitting that not knowledge only, but an unimpeachable observance also of the righteousness which is of the law, should both form his character and be generally acknowledged as his title to honour among men.⁶ The ardent and conspicuous preacher of a righteousness "apart from law" should stand upon a moral footing which deprived the legal adversaries of the gospel of all occasion to blaspheme. If publicans and harlots are freely welcomed, on repentance, to the love of God in Christ, it was obviously suitable that one whom all had respected as a blameless Pharisee should become the loudest herald of a grace

³ 2 Tim. iii. 14; Acts xxvi. 24, 25.

⁴ Prov. xvi. 23; Rom. vii. 9, 10; Luke xxi. 15.

⁵ *Notes on 2 Cor.* chap. iii. ⁶ Phil. iii. 6.

which abounded in righteousness over every kind of sin.

In the preparation of His own ambassadors, the Lord has respect to the nature of the service upon which He sends them. That a man, therefore, who was to be entrusted with a message which, when fully delivered and rightly understood, disallowed entirely not only the vanities of Gentile worship and the futilities of human philosophy, but the entire system of Judaism—excluding Jew and Gentile equally from that new assembly in the midst of which the risen and glorified Son of God now, by the Spirit, takes His place,⁷ transferring the sanctuary of God from earth to heaven, and nullifying all earlier ordinances by a declaration of the living and eternal truth—should be personally and completely versed in the nature and value of what he disallowed, was a thing morally essential to his acceptance as a teacher among men. One who knew what the law was only by report, and was himself uncircumcised, would have no claim to the ear of Israel, nor even to that of the more enlightened and enquiring of the Gentiles, among whom Jerusalem asserted still her title to veneration as the habitation of justice and the city of solemnities, and was acknowledged by many a proselyte as the place where men ought to worship, if they worshipped the true God. Nor was a thorough legal training the only preparation needed by the man who was to be distinctively the apostle of the uncircumcised, and to preach among them that were by nature without God and without hope in the world the unsearchable riches of Christ. To be

⁷ Col. iii. 11; Heb. ii. 12.

entitled to prove to Gentiles, polished or unpolished, that the wisdom of men is foolishness with God, it was necessary that he should not only be charged with a message of convincing power to deliver in His name, but that he should have a real acquaintance also with that on which his gospel poured contempt. God's witness should be able, as himself a master in such lore, to confront the varieties of unsatisfying human knowledge with a doctrine which alone claimed to be "the truth," and which appealed not less directly to man's cultivated reason and conscience than by its accompanying signs and wonders, it did to their familiar sense. Himself an hereditary holder of the hope of Israel, he must also be a Roman by birthright, and a Greek in respect of mental culture, in order to fit him thoroughly for the work for which he had been separated from his mother's womb.

But it is to the second of these distinctions that the mind of the apostle most frequently and naturally recurs in his many references to his own past history. His providential qualification for his work was something of which he might and doubtless did feel conscious, and which we who at this distance contemplate his history and watch his course can hardly fail to notice and appreciate. But that God should have "called him by His grace" from the far extreme of his malignant unbelief, by no less a voice than that of His own Son out of heaven, dispelling his native darkness by the manifested light of life, and vanquishing his ignorant hostility by the sweet convictions of redeeming love, was the unceasing subject of his wonder and the untiring boast of his confession. Like a true disciple of the grace in which

he gloried, he rejoices less in the powers and dignity of his apostleship than in his personal knowledge of the Saviour of his soul.⁸

Verse 16. "To reveal His Son in me," &c. We have seen of what material God formed His chosen vessel, and by what natural means he was made ready for the calling for which he was ordained. We are now to note in what consisted the *essential* character of his apostleship. That he might preach the Son of God among the Gentiles, God must first "reveal His Son *in* him." We should attentively consider this expression. And first let us mark the very broad distinction between the Lord's objective revelation of Himself to Saul of Tarsus, the persecutor and injurious, and this inward and subjective revelation of which Paul the believer and apostle speaks. The immediate effect of the former was darkness and not light, an utter prostration and withering of natural confidence and strength. It was the effect, so to speak, of the sudden contrast (then felt in its full force) of the majesty of heaven to the helplessness of sinful man; between the once self-reliant, but now utterly dismayed, pursuer of his own evil way and the holy brightness of that Presence to which *all* ways tend for their ultimate determination and award.⁹ Gracious words indeed were spoken from that Presence, but their consolation must be for a while deferred. The certainty that *Jesus*, whom he heretofore had hated so intensely, and whose blameless followers he so unrelentingly pursued, was verily THE LORD had filled him with a terrified astonishment, and turned the active and hot-blooded perse-

⁸ Luke x. 20; Phil. iii. 8, 9. ⁹ *Notes on 2 Cor.* chap. v. 10, 11.

cutor to a blind and fasting suppliant. And his prayer was as the cry of the afflicted when he pour-eth forth his soul to God. Out of the depths of his realized conviction as "the chief of sinners" he cried, and he was heard.¹ God, who had showed him to himself in all the terrible distinctness of his state and position as a lost gainsayer of His truth, gave truth its brightest honour by making it the messenger of righteous mercy to His contrite suppliant. Nor is there anything exceptional in the nature of Paul's calling, but in its manner only, and in the form and administration of the grace received. None come to Christ but by the Father, and in no heart is the Son of God revealed but by the quickening and manifesting power of the Holy Ghost. The few words of Ananias, who so lately trembled at the very name of Saul, were "the power of God unto salvation" to his opened ear, and by them God shined in his dark and sore-afflicted heart, to give there the light of the knowledge of His glory in the face of Jesus Christ.²

A knowledge, much or little, of the Son of God is the distinctive portion of all true believers, since they only are alive to God who have His Son.³ But to qualify an apostle for his mission there was requisite an intimacy of personal acquaintance with his Lord far surpassing in its measure that which was commonly vouchsafed to those to whom he preached and who received his words. The original companions of the Lord were prepared, in an important sense, for their after testimony by means of that long-continued personal association. Their testimony would

¹ Acts ix. 6-11.

² Acts ix. 17, 18; 2 Cor. iv. 6.

³ 1 John v. 12.

be borne in the enabling power of the Holy Ghost, but authenticated also, as to all that they related of their Master's life and death, His resurrection and ascension, by their own evidence as eye-witnesses of all those things.⁴ They could not but speak of the things which they had seen and heard, and the Spirit which spake in them was their partner and sustainer in their work.⁵ But Paul had no part in that first apostolate. What they attested and affirmed at peril of their lives, he blasphemously contradicted and would willingly have crushed. Yet to have seen and personally known the Saviour was necessary to a messenger who spoke to men under a title which implied that his mission was immediately from Himself. When, therefore, the time of Saul's conversion came, not only was the person of the Lord revealed objectively to his persecutor, but when also his soul's great bitterness was turned to peace, through the healing virtue of His name, the work of reconciliation was succeeded by a transcendent measure of divine illumination such as made Paul subjectively as real and true a witness of the things of which he spoke as were the earlier apostles of what they had seen with their eyes and their hands had handled of the word of life. He knew Him whom he trusted, not with a saving knowledge only, but, by special grace, in a receptive power of communion also, such as made his heart a fountain out of which should flow a more abundant river of divine comfort and instruction to the Church than had been granted to either of his predecessors.⁶

⁴ John xv. 26, 27; Acts ii. 32. ⁵ Acts iv. 20, 31; v. 32.

⁶ John vii. 28; 1 Cor. xv. 10.

To preach the Son of God among the nations of the earth was his definite commission; and that not in any connexion with Jerusalem or Jewish things, but as a minister of the Spirit and of *heavenly* things. His credentials as Christ's ambassador were straight from thence, and he spoke in his ministry of One whom, though he knew Him as perhaps none other among men had done, he knew in no sense after the flesh.⁷ To tell men, who were serving idols, of the God who made them, and, while reasoning of righteousness and temperance, to demonstrate the certainty of an appointed day of judgment for both quick and dead, was one part of his mission; but its main burden was to testify the gospel of the grace of God. And that the unsearchable riches of Christ might be worthily set forth among them, he received by revelation a measure of divine knowledge which made him first instead of last among his fellows in the apostolate, allowing him to be in this respect also no whit behind the chief of those who, as Christ's earlier messengers, had what Paul had not.⁸ His outward behaviour in the first days of his apostleship is related elsewhere with sufficient distinctness; in what is now before us we are allowed a nearer view of the internal working of his mind.

"Immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood."
A solemn consciousness of God's revealing presence

⁷ *Notes on 2 Cor.* chap. v. 16. With what a gradually subdued reluctance this ardent lover of his kindred after the flesh consented to the line of things marked out for him, is shown in his personal history, as collected from the Acts and from his own epistles, in a manner not less instructive than affecting.

⁸ Eph. iii. 2, *seq.*

severed him at once from any lower source of either counsel or direction. Like Moses, he was separated first to God, before he could become His mouth to those to whom he should be sent. We read, therefore, in these words the language, not of pride, but of that godly jealousy which, while bearing as its own the burden laid upon it by the Lord, seeks neither sanction nor sufficiency from men for the fulfilment of His charge. Of the capabilities of flesh and blood Paul had already had a competent experience, and that which itself has no entrance into the kingdom of God might hinder, but could never aid God's preacher in his work.

Verse 17. "Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them that were apostles before me," &c. Anointed apostles have something in them more than flesh and blood; nor would this last of the series, if in the presence of those who had companied with Christ on earth, have felt otherwise than he has elsewhere said;⁹ but he was now by divine appointment a partaker of their office, and the first duty of apostles is not to seek each other, but to address themselves to the commission which they have received of God. Now it was "to the Gentiles, and kings, *and* the children of Israel," that he was to bear the name of Christ;¹ but his early action as a preacher of the gospel was contrary to the *order*, though not beyond the measure of his rule.² Accordingly, in the historical narrative of his proceedings, we are told that his first and, as it would appear, his only preaching at Damascus was not to the Gentiles, but "in the synagogues" to his brethren after the flesh.³ He was allowed to prove, first to his

⁹ 1 Cor. xv. 9. ¹ Acts ix. 15. ² 2 Cor. x. 13. ³ Acts ix. 20.

former co-religionists, by the fact of his own conversion, that "Jesus is the Son of God," yet in the power of a testimony which made plain to those who listened to him that it was not to the Jew only that the word of God was thenceforth to be preached; and when his final expulsion from Damascus took place, it was the angry jealousy of his countrymen that set in hostile activity against him the governor who kept the place.⁴ In all this there was a concurrence, for an appointed season, of his own ardent desire with the predetermined counsels of his Lord. For not to Paul but to Cephas had been committed the opening of the kingdom of heaven to the Gentiles, and the conversion of Cornelius was later in point of time than the date of Paul's first visit to Jerusalem, to which reference will presently be made.⁵

Considerable importance attaches to the verse now before us, when read in comparison with Acts ix. 19, 20, because of its bearing on the very interesting question of the apostle's subjective preparation for his work. As to the *power* by which he wrought, it was that of God, and therefore always and equally sufficient; but is it likely, one may reasonably ask, that this suddenly-converted persecutor entered at once, and with no interval of meditative communing with God, on his appointed task? With God all things are possible, and in many a modern instance the

⁴ Acts ix. 23-25; 2 Cor. xi. 32, 33.

⁵ The apostle's own words to Agrippa are a decisive proof that his earlier testimony as a preacher of Christ was to the circumcision. He "shewed *first* to them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judea, *and* to the Gentiles, that they should repent," &c. (Acts xxvi. 20.)

transition from a state of open sin to an equally open assumption of the functions of a preacher has been remarkably, not to say alarmingly, rapid. But it does not appear, upon the whole evidence that we possess, that this "chosen vessel" put himself thus suddenly to proof. We are told that immediately after his baptism he was "certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus." Then follows the statement that he immediately "began to preach Jesus in the synagogues that He is the Son of God." What God had revealed to him came thus early forth; yet not, as the order of the narrative implies, without an interval of nurturing communion with the saints.

In the present passage he so puts together his not going to Jerusalem to the apostles, and his going off into Arabia, as to invite one of two conclusions. We may suppose him to mean what might be thus expressed: I had no need of apostolic ordination, or even countenance; for the Lord had looked on me, and in *that* strength I was to go. To the Gentiles was my first commission, and I went straight upon this service to Arabia, returning afterwards to Damascus, where my mouth had first been opened to confess the Lord. Or his words may be taken in this other sense: Need I had none to seek to Jerusalem for a confirmation of my title to preach Christ. Nor was I disobedient in my spirit to the heavenly vision. My need was of another kind. To become an effective minister of grace I must digest in solitude this new and amazing doctrine of divine righteousness which I had so suddenly and wondrously received. To face men worthily, I must commune first with God. I neared my duty really by seeming for a while to shun

it; not fleeing, like Jonah, from the face of God, but going rather to seek Him where both Moses and Elijah had received their deepest lessons of Jehovah and His ways. For though called to a service of unceasing activity, when once begun, I shrank from entering on it until more familiar in my spirit with the Lord, who had thus chosen me to bear His name.

There is moreover an indefiniteness belonging to the word "Arabia," which increases the difficulty of ascertaining precisely the apostle's meaning in this passage. All that can be affirmed with certainty is, that immediately on his miraculous conversion he both confessed Christ among those on whose destruction he was previously bent, and was acknowledged by them as a specially-appointed minister of God. That he rushed at once eagerly upon his work among the Gentiles cannot be asserted with any show of probability, since the facts already noticed lead plainly to an opposite conclusion. But that his career of active service as a preacher of the faith was preceded by a course of secret training under' the strong but gracious hand of Him who had so unexpectedly arrested and claimed him as a trophy of His own long-suffering mercy, seems consistent both with natural probability and with antecedent scriptural example.

Of the time, whether long or short, that he passed in Arabia we know nothing certainly. But it is unlikely that he remained long absent from Damascus, which we may well suppose presented to him a wider and more open field for his work as an evangelist. It was where men congregated most that Paul would find the fittest sphere for fulfilling the ministry which

he had received from the Lord. In every place indeed God was his witness;⁶ but we hear of him most frequently as well as most naturally in cities rather than in the retired places of the country: unlike his Master in this respect, since publication was the order of his work.

Verse 18. "Then⁷ after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter,"⁸ &c. Whether the commencement of this period is to be dated from the time of his conversion, or referred to his return from Arabia, is uncertain; but the frequent indistinctness of Scripture on such minor points will never cause regret to a sound-minded believer. Every fact in Paul's personal history would have for us a natural interest if known; but God's Spirit has written in the Word but *one* biography, and that for an end which would be helped in no wise by a fuller acquaintance on our parts with the footsteps even of His most devoted follower.⁹ Comparing, as before, Paul's personal narrative with the inspired record of his true and faithful yoke-fellow,¹ we find here the *motive* of the visit which is there noticed in more general terms, and in a different connection. It was to see Peter that he took his journey to Jerusalem after his final departure from Damascus. In the latter city he had lived and laboured in the truth until, his measured service being done, King Aretas' governor became the providential means of speeding him upon his further work. To Jerusalem, we may be sure, his heart had often turned before he actually went there; and with what

⁶ 2 Cor. ii. 14.

⁷ ἔπειτα.

⁸ "Cephas" is perhaps the preferable reading.

⁹ Luke i. 1; Acts i. 19; John xx. 30, 31. ¹ Acts ix. 26.

emotions he revisited the place where he had once raged so madly and destructively against the truth we may easily imagine. And we know enough upon his own testimony to justify the supposition that he would fain have prolonged his stay there indefinitely, and laboured among his much-loved kinsmen after the flesh, had he not been peremptorily ordered of the Lord elsewhere,² since to this visit is undoubtedly to be referred the rapt interview with his Master related in his speech to the excited populace of Jerusalem, which was delivered about two years later than the writing of this epistle. But he is here occupied with facts only, and makes mention of his journey and its object for the sole purpose of clearing himself in the eyes of the Galatian churches from the false imputations which attached to him, owing to the crafty misrepresentations which had been made to them by the Judaizing corrupters of the truth.

That he should desire especially to see Peter, and greet him in the Spirit's love, was but natural; not only because he had already known and hated him as Christ's chief messenger and witness at Jerusalem, but by a force of sympathy also which could not fail to operate in his bosom since the time of his own miraculous call to the apostolate. That a true venerative feeling also was mingled with his wish we cannot reasonably doubt. Whom Christ had honoured Paul was not likely to despise, though truth might, as it subsequently did, compel him to oppose for a season the very man whom he thus diligently sought. But it is likely that this visit was not made on private grounds alone. Paul's ministry while at

² Acts xxii. 17-22.

Damascus, so far as we have authoritative notice of it in the Scripture, was limited to Jews; and it is evident that his desire was to continue longer in the line of service which he had begun, by labouring, for the most part at least, among his brethren in the flesh. Yet he could not but be conscious that "the Gentiles" were emphatically his commission. Was he then to lead or follow in this divinely ordered course? We cannot know for certain how much or how little he then knew of the tenor of the Lord's parting charge to the eleven;³ still less of his earlier delegation of precedence in the work to Peter; but it is an inference, sustained by what we know upon inspired testimony of his conduct, that Paul's distinctive labour, as the apostle of the Gentiles, did not begin until after his return by sea from Cæsarea to Tarsus in Cilicia.⁴ We read that at Jerusalem "he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians," or Hellenistic Jews,⁵ but it seems likely that his first distinct testimony to the Gentiles was delivered in the city of his birth.⁶

Verse 19. "But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother." Their absence on their Master's work elsewhere is the only reasonable explanation of this fact, Barnabas, whom when writing to the Church at Corinth, he acknowledges as his fellow-labourer, and who introduced him, we are told, "to the apostles,"⁷ is not here recognized under that title; Paul's present intention being to

³ Acts i. 8.⁴ Acts ix. 30.⁵ τοὺς Ἑλληνιστάς, Acts ix. 29.⁶ Perhaps even later than this, and at another place. *Infra*, on chap. v. 21.⁷ 1 Cor. ix. 6; Acts ix. 27.

assert only his own claim to a perfect equality with those who had been called personally by the Lord in the days of His flesh. James the Lord's brother, whom he does thus acknowledge, is known in that character solely on this testimony of Paul.⁸ The whole force and meaning of this verse is to show that while his heart was fully open to the comfort of association with his fellows in the ministry; his own liberty of service was in no respect dependent on their sanction. He was a *visitor only* on this first occasion. Afterwards, as we shall see, he went up from his true work among the Gentiles in another character and for another end.

Verse 20. "Now the things which I write unto you, behold, before God, I lie not." Why, it may be asked, this solemn asseveration in confirmation of a narrative so probable in itself, and so simply and naturally told? Assertions, we may be sure, of a misleading kind had been made by those who had been endeavouring in his absence to mar the husbandry of God in the Galatian churches, with respect to Paul's earlier history; and these had no doubt produced a mischievous effect. He is not content, therefore, with correcting a false statement by a true one, but adds, as became one who claimed so distinctly to be God's minister and messenger, this solemn appeal to Him in whose name and power he professed to work. It was characteristic of Paul

⁸ A good deal of difficulty has been felt in determining the person here intended, since we know from John vii. that the brethren of Jesus did not then believe in Him, and we have no subsequent notice of the call of any of them to the apostolate. Many, on the ground of this difficulty, have assumed the identity of this James and the son of Alphæus, but their reasoning is not conclusive.

habitually to invest facts, even of a comparatively unimportant kind, which stood in any sort of relation to his service as an apostle, with the weight and sanction of that name, presenting in this, as in all other respects, a bright and living contrast to the false apostles whose confidence and dignity were of themselves.⁹

Verse 21. "Afterwards I came," &c. From Jerusalem, by way of Cæsarea, to Tarsus, was his recorded course, as we have seen, and at the latter place he appears to have remained some time, making it, as may be fairly inferred from the broader language of this verse, his head-quarters while engaged in the service of the gospel in those parts. There at least he was sought and found by Barnabas when, with his heart full of gladness at the first beginnings of the work of grace among the Greeks at Antioch, he sped thither in quest of Saul, to summon him as his associate in a work to which he knew him to have been pre-eminently called.

The character of Paul's work at Tarsus and in its neighbourhood previously to the arrival of Barnabas can only be conjectured; as no facts are recorded which enable us to assign a positive date to the commencement of his work among the Gentiles. We know, however, from his own words to king Agrippa, that the circumcision were his first object, whether at Damascus, at Jerusalem, or in Judea generally.¹ Nor can we reasonably doubt that in his native city his earliest, and perhaps his only, personal labours were among his kindred after the flesh. It is indeed far from improbable that Barnabas, who was the first

⁹ 2 Cor. xi. 31.

¹ Acts xxvi. 20.

to welcome him on his reappearance as a Christian at Jerusalem, may have been the means also of launching him effectually upon his true career as the apostle of the Gentiles. We know by an abundant evidence his natural and ardent attachment to his countrymen; and even as the Lord's commission to the eleven remained unheeded by His chief apostle, until brought, years after, miraculously to his remembrance,² so may Paul also have required this fresh summons to divert him from an otherwise erroneous course.

The work of elective grace which was inaugurated at Jerusalem with external portents and irrefragable demonstrations of miraculous power, began at Antioch by the quiet but effectual communication of God's message of saving mercy, through the yearning earnestness of men who by grace loved both their Saviour and their kind. Converted Jews of Cyprus and Cyrene felt themselves impelled to tell of the Christ whom they had found, because first found of Him, to Grecians also. The same Spirit, who had but a little while before sent Peter to Cornelius, now stirred the hearts of these elect strangers of the dispersion to publish openly the gospel of God's love to man. Nor did they speak in vain. What Israel was everywhere rejecting the Gentiles eagerly received, and at Antioch "a great number believed and turned unto the Lord." For an entire year, we are also told, Paul wrought there uninterruptedly with his large-hearted associate;³ nor is it likely that they moved from thence until separated, by the express commandment of the Spirit, to the larger

² Acts xi. 16.

³ Acts xi. 20, 21, 26.

service of evangelization to which both were called.⁴ It was in the course probably of the earliest of the last mentioned missionary tours that Paul paid his first visit to Galatia, though the time of his doing so is not clearly indicated. He seems to have gone thither originally alone, though he subsequently traversed the same region in company with Silas, after parting with his former yoke-fellow at Antioch.⁵

Verses 22-24. "And was unknown by face unto the churches in Judæa *which were in Christ*," &c.⁶ There were other assemblies in Judæa which were not in Christ, and to which he had been once well known, when from city to city he pursued the blameless sheep of Jesus, imprisoning and beating in every synagogue them that believed and called upon that name;⁷ but his face had been never seen in an assembly of God's living worshippers in Judæa till the time of which he speaks. These words are full of strong reproach. The churches of Judæa had not seen Paul, those of Galatia had both seen and heard and joyfully received him. They were moreover his

⁴ Acts xiii. 2.

⁵ Acts xv. 39; xvi. 6. Galatia is mentioned once only in the historical narrative, in the recital of the journey undertaken for the purpose of re-visiting the places where Paul and Barnabas had already preached the gospel. The exclusive use, however, of the singular pronoun in this epistle, when the occasion was such as to invite the association of other names with his own, had any such been with him in his earlier work among them, raises a strong presumption that he was alone in the planting of the churches in that region.

⁶ It is evident from this statement that his service, jointly with Barnabas, as the almoner of the Gentile saints in Syria, was accomplished by a direct journey to Jerusalem, and an equally direct return to the field in which he was so prosperously labouring. (Acts xi. 29, 30; xii. 25.)

⁷ Acts xvii. 19.

own children in the faith. Yet how different the estimation in which he was then held respectively by them both. The rumour of his preaching, not circumcision but Christ crucified, filled the former with joy and thankfulness; the bitter remembrance of his earlier hostility having been effaced by the assurance, that he who once raged so relentlessly against the truth was become, through grace, a zealous preacher of the faith. And they of Galatia had known these things, and yet their ears were open to the ignorant and injurious sophistries of Judaizing teachers. Well then might he marvel both at their simplicity and at the bold and successful craft of the deceiver. For the very point of his declaration in these verses is that Jews, who of course had been nurtured in the very things which the Galatians were thoughtlessly desiring, gave glory to God because Paul was now preaching the faith which had already brought themselves from the vain conversation received by tradition from their fathers, into the liberty and peace of God; and the faith which they rejoiced in was what the Galatians had received. Yet through the darkening effect of evil counsel, these unsuspecting trusters in appearances had been so beguiled and alienated from the way of God, that they were ready to question the sincerity of Paul's loving service to themselves, and to accuse him of withholding that which his successors in the work (true friends of their souls as they professed to be) had since laboured so zealously to impart. But where, in their altered condition, was the glory due to God?

CHAPTER II.

WE have seen in the foregoing chapter the anxiety of Paul to prove to the Galatians that his work, in which God had so largely blessed him, which had excited in the hearts of his brethren of the circumcision such joy and thankfulness, and of which they were themselves a fruit and seal, had been wrought without formal apostolic sanction or concurrence. The ministry which he had received directly from the Lord he had exercised quite independently of men, though often in a willing association with like-minded fellow-labourers. We are now to see him in a relation to Jerusalem and things Jewish no longer negative, but positive, that by a solemn conference with those whom he had previously rather shunned than sought, the truth of his own calling and the solidity of his claim to be regarded as the apostle of the Gentiles in a distinctive sense might be confirmed by the unanimous suffrage of the earlier pillars of God's house.

Verse 1. "Then fourteen years after I went up again to Jerusalem," &c. This period dates most probably from his arrival at Tarsus, and the journey here mentioned followed a long and apparently uninterrupted stay at Antioch, after his return thither with Barnabas from their joint and special mission

to the Gentiles, as detailed in Acts xiii., xiv. The occasion of this visit and its immediate results are described in Acts xv.; but to understand thoroughly the situation so strikingly depicted in the latter chapter, it is necessary to compare it with Paul's personal narrative as here presented. We should bear also carefully in mind the restricted nature of his previous intercourse with the apostles and brethren at Jerusalem. The single, but important, particular in which the apostle's statement differs from that of Luke is that of the "certain other" chosen delegates of which the latter speaks, one only is here mentioned, and he rather as a selected companion of Paul than as a joint messenger with himself of the Church at Antioch. The providential mercy involved in this choice becomes apparent in what follows.

Verse 2. "And I went up by revelation," &c. In form he went up as a delegate, with Barnabas, from the Church at Antioch, but that mission was, we are expressly told, like their earlier departure on a very different service, by a special revelation from the Lord. Nor is it difficult to perceive the moral necessity of direct and extraordinary guidance being vouchsafed to him at this crisis. The lapse of time had given opportunity for questions to arise, and the adversary was labouring earnestly to neutralize the gospel of the grace and glory of God in the person of His Son among those who had listened to it, by claiming, if not for the now obsolete sacrificial and ceremonial observances of Judaism, at least for the positive legal teaching of Moses, an equal and concurrent authority with the present testimony of the Holy Ghost. We must remember also that the many

years which had elapsed since Paul's first visit to Jerusalem to see Peter had not been without their natural effect on the minds both of the Church there generally and of the apostles who were its official guardians and guides. Tidings had reached them of the progress of the gospel among the Gentiles, and rumours were doubtless in frequent circulation as to the quality of the doctrine propagated so successfully by Paul. He preached a gospel in the name of Jesus Christ, but was it altogether genuine, and such as Jerusalem had heard from the beginning? To be zealous is also to be jealous always. And they of Jerusalem were zealous, but with a zeal, as we well know from what is given of their history by the Spirit, but partially according to knowledge. Nor is it unreasonable to suppose that more or less anxiety on his account may have visited the minds also of God's earlier witnesses, as they listened to the statements made by those of the circumcision who had misunderstood, or misinterpreted, his free and outspoken declaration of that righteousness of God which is "apart from law."¹

The Lord's forerunner, when in prison as the reward of his fidelity as a preacher of repentance, heard rumours of the works of Christ which set him doubting till, through the testimony of his returning messengers and the gracious words of admonition which they brought,² he recovered his first faith. In like manner the earlier apostles, themselves emerging gradually from the mists of traditional habit and observance, and learning slowly in an atmosphere of

¹ *χωρίς νόμου*, Rom. iii. 21.

² Matt. xi. 2-6.

Jewish prejudice that partakers of Christ and of the heavenly calling have definitively ceased from man, and that the seat of the Father's worship is transferred from the city where David dwelt to Jerusalem above, may have felt misgivings such as a personal interview alone could effectually remove as to the real nature of the work of which they heard so much. All this seems implied in the language of the present verse, which assures us of a special and separate intercourse on Paul's part with "them of reputation," in addition to the public rehearsal by himself and Barnabas of the work wrought among the Gentiles by their means.³ They had evidently questions to put to him which on his part he was no less eager to resolve. He at least was not running doubtingly upon the race which he had so hopefully begun; but he felt neither anger nor surprise at the misgivings entertained respecting him by other men, and he was content to labour patiently for their removal by a living comparison of *his* gospel of the grace of God and *theirs*.

Verse 3. "But not even Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised." As a new creature in Christ, Paul had ceased to know himself or others after the flesh; yet, for the furtherance of the gospel to the Jews, he willingly became a Jew.⁴ But to win Jews from themselves to Christ was the end of his concessions, and not to hide the light of His glory a second time beneath the vail of Moses. To all demands, therefore, on their parts of a positive kind he turned uniformly a deaf ear. For Moses, Jehovah's faithful minister to

³ Acts xv. 12.

⁴ 2 Cor. v. 16, 17; 1 Cor. ix. 20.

Israel; is dead,⁵ and another and abiding Mediator stands now between God and men. The God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ is not the God of the Jew only, but of the Gentile also, and by a new and effectual circumcision, in His dead and risen Christ, His believing people are now separated to Himself.⁶ Titus, then, must not be circumcised, because it was demanded by the Pharisaic confessors of the gospel as a necessary addition to his faith. Paul, who himself performed this outward rite on Timothy, already half an Israelite by birth, as a precaution of loving expediency before presenting him as his fellow-labourer to Jewish eyes,⁷ refuses absolutely to allow this thorough Greek to undergo it. For the Greek, whose desire to see Jesus is now met by the full gospel of His grace,⁸ is converted, not to Moses, but to Christ. He would not permit, therefore, the sign of bondage to be placed, as of necessity, on one whom the Son of God already had made free indeed.⁹

Verse 4. "And that because of false brethren unawares brought in," &c. Men are judged by their deeds, not by their words, which too often are the echo merely of their own deceitful hearts. It is unnecessary to suppose that all, or even any, of the persons here described had joined themselves originally to the Church with distinctly fraudulent intentions; but it is certain that their confession of the name of Christ was premature, if not actually

⁵ Joshua i. 1. As a witness and recipient of grace he lives and shines for ever in the brightness of His glory of whom he spake. (Luke ix. 28-31.)

⁶ Rom. iii. 29; Col. ii. 11-13.

⁷ Acts xvi. 3.

⁸ John xii. 20, *seq.*

⁹ John viii. 35, 36.

insincere, since their hearts were still wearing willingly the yoke from which Jesus died to set His people free. But we are taught here in a very solemn manner, by example, the value of the Lord's warning, that none can serve two masters. A namer of the name of Christ, whose heart is not thoroughly the Lord's, serves another better than the Saviour of his soul. He serves himself, and is sowing to his flesh. Thus these home-born slaves of their hereditary traditions, who perhaps had heard gladly what they did not understand, returned by a natural gravitation to their former habits of religious thought and feeling when first impressions had worn off; and still maintaining outwardly a Christian confession, without faith's strength to bear the burden of the cross, were endeavouring to drag back into their former darkness those who were rejoicing in God's marvellous light. They are called "false brethren" because of their implied denial of the truth. An evil motive is also imputed to them, such as the Searcher of hearts can see and judge, while the hypocrite continues self-deceived.

The end of the commandment is love out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned; and they who swerved from the truth and turned aside to vain jangling (and there were many such in the apostle's day) did so because they had first let slip what once seemed to have been divinely planted in their hearts.¹ Unruly and vain talkers of this kind were among the chief opponents of the gospel from the beginning; nor is their generation yet extinct, but found rather in an increased activity in our day,

¹ 1 Tim. i. 5-7; Titus i. 10; Heb. ii. 1.

though their error is of an altered and more plausible, though not less dangerous form. Unauthorized church traditions always rest ultimately on perverted *law*; for true gospel gives them no support. Ritualistic Christianity is merely baptized Judaism, and the lying pretensions of those who call themselves by the new and strange title of "priests of the church" are of closest kin to the "false brethren" and "false apostles," who as ministers of Satan, and themselves duped by their own delusions, sought ever to pervert the right ways of the Lord, understanding neither what they said nor whereof they affirmed. For the church of God has no officiating priestly intercessor but the great High Priest of her confession, the exalted and consecrated Son of God; while each living member of His house is, by grace and standing, both a king and priest, as called into the fellowship of his Redeemer, and is ordained to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.²

Verse 5. "To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour," &c. The battle of their deliverance and ours was fought and won, to his own never-ending honour, by this faithful and quick-sighted champion of the faith in the very citadel of the opposers' strength. Paul's firmness, which his enemies most probably condemned as obstinacy, was not for his own credit but for the gospel's sake. As a faithful steward and witness he spoke manfully for God and for His glory when jealously withstanding the false claims of the Judaizers. That God's gospel, as the glorifier of His Son, was perfect and incapable of mixture or addition, and in its nature superseding by

² 1 Peter ii. 5; 1 Cor. i. 9.

fulfilment all anterior testimonies, he maintained in the common interest of all who then or since had knowledge of its joyful sound. Deference or subjection he had none towards men whose confident assertions proved nothing but their ignorance of God. And let us mark well the significance of the word "subjection." Error never puts itself upon a par with truth, but boldly challenges the mastery. It is a form of the instinctive opposition of the flesh to the Spirit, and the instigator of the flesh in all its forms is Satan. Hence any tolerance, on our part, of pronounced doctrinal error is a giving of both place and precedence to the devil in the house of God. The apostle knew well the inevitable and fatal consequences of yielding or compromise in such a case.

The truth of the gospel was, he felt, *destroyed*, if circumcision were exacted from the Gentile believer as a part of his obedience to the faith. For although circumcision was before the law—of the fathers and not of Moses³—it had since become the standing sign of legal obligation; and the law is *not of faith*. If God's gospel be His truth, grace must be grace, unmixed and unfalsified by its opposite. Combination of "the letter" with "the Spirit" there could be none. The one kills, the other makes alive. Nor could the Jew's natural superiority to the Gentile be permitted to follow him beyond the living door of Christ. His covenant preëminence was recognized, and precedence given him, in the ministration of the free grace of the gospel. "To the Jew first," is the order followed by the Spirit as the witness and preacher of the righteousness of God. But from the moment that the Jew

³ John vii. 22.

bowed, with understanding of its meaning, to the *cross*, his hereditary and covenanted honour expired with *himself*. As a new creature in Christ he stands in the living power of that righteousness of which circumcision was originally, to the faith of Abraham, both the seal and promissory sign. Jews live and die, but do not rise again. A Christian is a new and risen man.⁴ Salvation is "of the Jews;" for the Saviour took their flesh;⁵ but in its resulting completeness as far above them as heaven is higher than the earth, and as Spirit excels flesh. Jesus Christ of the seed of David is risen from the dead, and is the same, now and for ever, as before He died; for perfection can undergo no change. Fulfilling all righteousness, and sustaining all true characters and relationships of time and place, while essentially without beginning of days or end of life, He will, at the appointed time, return with mercies to the city over which He wept; and the kingdom shall in His person be restored to Israel in the day when their iniquity is purged through their willing confession of His name. As Jehovah's Christ He will have His glory, as He has already had His shame. But He now knows His people, and is known of them, in the truth and glory of His person, as the Word made flesh, and by His higher and eternal title as the Son of God. The church of the first-born worship, in spirit, in Jerusalem above. God's children have an unction from the Holy One, and are sealed by the Spirit for the day of redemption. To impose a carnal rite on such would be to bring them back from light to darkness, from heaven to earth,

⁴ Col. iii. 3; Eph. ii. 5, 6.

⁵ John iv. 22; Rom. ix. 5.

and from liberty to bondage. To accept it on their parts would be tantamount to an admission that Christ and His blessed gospel are not *all*, that something else is a needful co-ordinate with Himself. In other words, it would change the glory of the gospel to dishonour, and its truth into a lie.

That "the truth of the gospel" might remain with those who had once heard it was the supreme anxiety of Paul; and an attentive reader, not of his epistles only, but of those also of the earlier apostles, cannot fail to see that the seduction of believers from the truth which they had once known and confessed is the danger against which the warnings of the Spirit are incessantly directed.⁶ It becomes us therefore, whose lot has fallen on so late an hour of the day of long-suffering, to take good heed, first, that we rightly understand what is meant by "the truth of the gospel," and then that we embrace and hold it fast as our very life.

The truth of the gospel is the doctrine of salvation, as declared by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven in the name and as the witness of the Lord Jesus Christ. Its peculiarity is this: that it disallows all natural claims, or pleas, or hopes; and contradicts authoritatively that which was once enjoined by divine command upon the only nation that God had ever called distinctively His own. The law called on men to justify themselves. The gospel approves the law as the just and holy witness and discoverer of human sin, but supersedes it in its former office of the teacher of God's children, by the revelation of that higher and *living* truth of which

⁶ 2 Cor. xi. 3; 2 Peter iii. 17; 1 John ii. 26.

it spake⁷—the specific purpose and intent of the law in its relation to the gospel is declared with much fulness by the apostle in the following chapter. What we have here to insist on is, that the gospel of our salvation is in its tone and character exactly contrary to law. “To him that worketh *not*,” and to no other, it assigns both forgiveness of sins and the gift of divine righteousness on the sole condition of his *faith*. We may not work upon the Sabbath of God’s saving grace. Christ is that Sabbath; rest for God and man alike. For God, as the full realization of His own good pleasure in the obedience of His Son; for man, by the finishing of all transgression and the bringing in of everlasting righteousness through the dying and reviving of the Lamb.

The truth therefore of the gospel is, that they who believe it are justified freely by the grace of God, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus; that He is Himself *our* righteousness by *faith*, even as He is eternally the right arm of Jehovah’s righteousness, in nature and in fact; that the time therefore of doubt and despondency is past for all who have an ear for God, seeing that it is He who is the judge of all who now “preaches peace by Jesus Christ.” There is no saving and effectual gospel of God for the careless, and impenitent, and unbelieving. Grace

⁷ “The law was given by Moses, *grace* and *truth* came by Jesus Christ.” (John i. 17.) Yet “thy law is the truth” is an inspired declaration also. (Ps. cxix. 142.) The difference is this: Till Jesus lived and died the law was truth, but unfulfilled. Its fulfiller is truth *absolutely*, and, as the righteous consummator of the law, He becomes in the abundance of His grace the beginning and assurance of His people’s hope.

saves only by that faith which is itself the gift of God. As it is written,⁸ "It is of faith, that it might be by grace: to the end the promise might be *sure*" to all who are followers of Abraham's faith. Christian doctrines are realities to the believer only,⁹ and it is evident that none can believe truly in a *Saviour* who does not first believe that he is personally *lost*. And such faith produces its emotional results. A conviction of sin clothes the heart of the believer with despair and dread: for he believes that God is just, while as yet unacquainted with the mystery of His grace; for the same reason a belief in the truth of God's great salvation fills it with the joy and peace of God. As the spirit of wisdom has before declared: "Heaviness in the heart of a man maketh it stoop; but a good word maketh it glad."¹ The heaviness is in and of ourselves, and fostered by the devil, who skilfully manipulates the evil heart of unbelief. The good word, or gospel, is from without; from God who might take vengeance, but who chooses mercy. In effect the truth of the gospel is the word of life eternal or of endless death, according as it is received or rejected by those to whom it is addressed.

The gospel is the food of faith, which, thus nourished, brings forth fruit to God by love. But to confound this result with its cause, and make love a *condition* of acceptance, is to falsify the grace and truth of God. For a born sinner is, until his heart is changed, a hater not a lover of the God who made

⁸ Rom. iv. 16.

⁹ Realities, that is, of grace, mercy, and peace. A neglected or despised gospel turns to a sentence of irremediable condemnation in the day when God will judge.

¹ Prov. xii. 25.

him.² If any love God truly, it is because He first loved them, and the proof of that love is the giving of His only begotten Son for our sins.³ The truth of the gospel is in one word, *Christ*—the Son of God incarnate, living, suffering, dying, rising; crowned, first with thorns and then with glory—and all by the grace of God *for us*. The truth of the gospel is God's explanation of the mystery of His own exceeding love. To qualify this truth by additions of our own is to dishonour it and hide its glory from our eyes. To put outward decoration on it is to shame it and confound ourselves. To give moreover a false welcome to the gospel, by imagining in ourselves a *natural* capability of either grace or truth, is to impose fatally on ourselves. Humanity, as seen in Adam and his generation, is a lie and a regret in its Creator's eyes.⁴ The last Adam, not the first, is the true image and glory of God, His choice and His delight. No form of doctrine therefore that treats "the natural man," or "flesh and blood," as capable by any means of pleasing God, is according to "the truth of the gospel." The faith by which alone it is possible to please Him, forsakes the old, with a confession of its ruin, to seek its safety in the new, fleeing for refuge to the hope set before it in the gospel, and that hope is Jesus Christ.⁵

We must distinguish, alas! in our deeply corrupted yet fair-seeming age, between things real and false; between Christ and what has a nominal claim only to be His. God's elect are often hidden in this

² θεοστοργής. Rom i. 30.

³ 1 John iv. 8-10.

⁴ Ps. lxii. 9; Gen. vi. 6; 2 Pet. iii. 5-7.

⁵ Heb. xi. 6; vi. 18; 1 Tim. i. 1.

world from every eye but His, yet we must remember that the Spirit equally protests against all forms of human doctrine and unauthorised ecclesiastical pretension. We do well therefore to weigh carefully in the balance of the sanctuary the claims of the particular system to which we may find ourselves attached through habit, or example, or a merely human persuasion. The truth of the gospel is not "Popery," which crowns its enormous pile of error by investing a mere worm of earth with an office and attributes which belong only to the Holy Ghost. Nor is it "Ritualism"—a moon-light and halting imitation of its older and more consistent rival. Nor is it broad-church humanitarianism, with its latitudinarian easiness of creed. Still less is it to be found in the persuasive but Christ-denying theories of those who take the beam of judgment from the hands of Him who denounces endless wrath on the impenitent, in order to adjust it more exactly to their gentler thoughts. For it is according to Paul's gospel that God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, with everlasting consequences.⁶

It may be well asked further: Is "the truth of the gospel" found always in its purity even in communities professedly evangelical? How often are law and grace mingled together, to the sore damage of their hearers, in the teachings even of devoted men! When, for example, the doctrine of personal election is denied or explained away, can the Father, who alone draws the chosen vessels of His mercy to the Saviour, be truly represented? Is a doctrine, again, which looks for its acceptance to the natural will of

⁶ Rom. ii. 8-16; 2 Thess. i. 9.

man, the true gospel of the grace of God? The truth of the gospel satisfies no itching ear, but fills and makes glad the broken and the contrite heart. It meets and comforts to the full that craving which the Holy Ghost creates in the soul of a divinely judged and self-tormented sinner. It is powerless for good unless mixed with a faith that welcomes it. It is the power of God unto salvation to all who receive it, as their father Abraham did, as the gracious and soul-subduing declaration of His will.

The art of the deceiver is in nothing more manifest at present than in the modern habit of turning positive doctrines into "open questions." Men seem fast forgetting that God's words are also His *commands*; that His overtures of mercy are injunctions to do honour to His Christ, and that if the gospel is preached without reserve among the Gentiles, it is "for the obedience of faith."⁷ He seeks indeed with earnestness to win His natural enemies to a hearty reconciliation. His ministers are like men that sue for favour, as ambassadors of Christ.⁸ To evade His entreaties and thus resist the Holy Ghost, while professing a religious willingness to lead a Christian life and benefit our kind, is to mock Him with the sacrifice of Cain; while the blood of sprinkling, which now speaketh better things than Abel's to the truly contrite heart, must, if its pleading be neglected, cry out for final judgment against the proud despisers of His grace. There is no room for *honest* questionings where God has clearly spoken. Since Christ has silenced Moses, to raise questions about the law is only to disturb God's peace by human

⁷ Rom. xvi. 26.

⁸ 2 Cor. v. 20.

and Satanic bickerings. Hence the dishonour poured everywhere in the New Testament upon gratuitous disputations. In *that sense*, the servant of the Lord ought not to strive;⁹ but to hold and contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints is the highest praise of a true minister of God. Under the sun there is a time for all things, for sternness and decision, as well as for yieldingness and patience. To be deferential and complying when error is aggressive, is to flatter iniquity at the expense of truth. Not for an hour therefore would Paul admit the claims of those who were setting up a title of supremacy for themselves and their pretentious ignorance. To weakness and prejudice he would show all patience, but gave no quarter to mere carnal pride. And in this he is our example, since the same or like conflict must be waged by all in whom God's word abides, until the offence of the cross is forgotten in the wished for revelation of the Lord.¹

Verse 6. "But of them that seemed to be somewhat," &c. Rendering to all their 'due, in the true spirit of his Master,'² if he meets empty pretensions with a just contempt, he has honour for those whose original title to it, as the truly called apostles of the Lord, had been confirmed by their fidelity to the trust committed to them. The genuine apostles ever had Paul's heartiest veneration in their place, while his own true subjection to the Lord kept him equally removed from servile obsequiousness and carnal independency. There is nothing in the language here employed that in the slightest degree

⁹ 2 Tim. ii. 23, 24.

¹ 1 Pet. i. 13; Rev. ii. 25.

² Rom. xiii. 7; Matt. xxii. 21.

implies detraction or an undervaluing of those whom the Lord had called before himself. If it be a divine principle to make the last first, it is true also morally that the last remains willingly in his original place until bidden by the Master to ascend. To God's glory, whose grace is measured at His sovereign will, and who is a respecter of no man's person, Paul could, on fit occasions, claim for himself such excellency as truth witnessed in him;³ his object here however is not comparison, but a necessary assertion only of an official equality. Personally both he and they were nothing; as God's ministers and Christ's apostles they stood upon the same footing, with whatever difference of gift.

The troublers of the Galatian churches were no doubt in the habit of invidiously magnifying the names and pretensions of those who held official pre-eminence in the church at Jerusalem. Cleaving still, in the spirit of their minds, to the place which the great King had left desolate, while unable to deny that to the Gentiles also God had granted repentance unto life, they dreamed of a lasting supremacy for Jewish over Gentile saints, and made the earthly and not the heavenly Jerusalem their chief joy. Paul tells therefore to his misguided children in the faith the plain story of his dealings with those who both seemed to be and were of note. In conference they added to him neither dignity nor knowledge. They met and mutually recognized each other on the basis of the common faith, and with official credentials of an equal validity on either side.

Verses 7, 8. "But contrariwise, when they saw that

³ 1 Cor. xv. 10; 2 Cor. xii. 11.

the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed to me," &c. Free intercourse in the fear and love of God revealed to both parties most distinctly the relative position and just claims of each. It is to be noticed that in the *council* at Jerusalem Paul was silent, or spoke only as a witness, with his fellow-labourer, of the work of God. With a just humility he seems ever to have taken, when possible, a subordinate place. But the questionings of the elder apostles brought out into prominence the special honour which the Lord intended for him, and procured for him a general recognition on their parts of distinctive precedence in his own appointed charge. Every apostle preached the true gospel of God; but to Peter and to Paul there belonged, by the Master's sovereign good pleasure, a name and place which their fellows might acknowledge without envy, to the glory of their common Lord. For in both cases the effectual worker was not man but God. Each had his testimony from the field of labour into which he had been sent, and each took an unfeigned pleasure in imputing honour to the other, so long as both were walking consciously beneath the eye of God.⁴

The distinction here made between the gospel of the uncircumcision and the gospel of the circumcision is one which should be carefully observed. To Peter was entrusted the latter, the main end of which was to bring the elect of Israel forth from legal bondage into the adoption and liberty of sons. But in the gospel of the uncircumcision there is found, besides the amplest exposition of the free grace of God and of the mystery of the Church, an element also of distinct

⁴ *Conf.* 2 Peter iii. 15, 16.

and special prophecy to which further reference will be made hereafter.⁵ Let it here only be remembered that God's present mission of grace to the Gentiles is for a limited period and a special end. It is not to convert the nations to Himself, but to take from among them by the power of His gospel a peculiar people for the name of Jesus Christ.⁶

Verse 9. "And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars," &c. Collectively God's apostles and prophets are called the foundation of the Church.⁷ Individually they are here styled "pillars;" an expression needing little explanation, as its force and fitness are hardly to be overlooked. Each faithful witness is a pillar of the truth that he maintains. The Church or true assembly of the faithful is collectively the pillar and ground of the truth.⁸ To be acknowledged everlastingly under this distinctive name is among the recompences kept in store by redeeming Love for those who faithfully abide in Him.⁹ John, James, and Cephas were, as inspired witnesses and scribes of Christ, what they seemed to be; not then only, and to the church at Jerusalem so soon to be dispersed, but by our own witness also who now live upon their words. There is an affecting beauty in his brief but pregnant description of this scene. Truth answers easily to truth, and love to love. What Paul said in proof of the genuineness of his own ministry enabled his predecessors in the apostolic calling to discover clearly the presence of a higher will and power than his own. They perceived that grace had been given him of God, as also to

⁵ *Infra*, chap. vi. 16.

⁶ Acts xv. 14.

⁷ Eph. ii. 20.

⁸ 1 Tim. iii. 15.

⁹ Rev. iii. 12.

themselves, and their hands gave a ready outward confirmation to the glad conviction of their hearts. Accepting the circumcision as their own appointed field, they speed their brethren joyfully upon their separate charge to seek Christ's "other sheep" among the Gentiles.¹ And if the words "to me" should seem invidious, after so recent a mention of his fellow-labourer, they are not really so; for the Galatians were concerned at present with Paul only, and for aught that appears had known nothing personally of his associate in this mission to Jerusalem.

Verse 10. "Only they would that we should remember the poor," &c. Why, it may be asked, this particular desire? Was it only because experience had taught them the practical difficulty of combining charity with ministerial activity? or had it an especial reference to the impoverished condition of many of the saints at Jerusalem, still suffering the effects of the famine predicted long before by Agabus? Be this as it may, we cannot but notice in it a provision for the maintenance of practical and sympathetic unity among the naturally diverse elements which constitute the Church of God. The love which is of God, and is the bond of perfectness to His true children, embraces Christ without distinction, and wherever found, in the members of His mystic body. If we know and bear in mind *His* poverty, we shall not be inattentive to His silent yet expressive calls on our sympathy in the known afflictions and necessities of those who bear His name.² Paul's zealous interest in

¹ John x. 16.

² 1 John iii. 17, 18; iv. 20.

this fellowship of kindness is not attested here only, but repeatedly and much more in detail elsewhere.³

Verse 11. "But when Peter⁴ was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face," &c. It is likely that the fact here related in its true connection had been distorted by the Judaizers in Galatia, and turned into an accusation against Paul, whom they were ready at all times to malign as a denier of Moses and his words. Peter was known to be the apostle of the circumcision. If Paul therefore opposed him, not at Jerusalem but in a Gentile city, was it not a presumptive evidence that they differed in their doctrine, and that Paul to his zeal as a professed convert to the gospel had added that of a renegade from the earlier commandment which Peter venerated still and kept? Else why so detailed an account of this event to these Galatians? The incrimination of his fellow-servant would of itself add nothing to the weight of what the Spirit taught by Paul; and doubtless, were he writing by permission only, one who both knew and practised charity so well would have preferred to hide, rather than to publish and lastingly record, his fellow-servant's sin.⁵ But as an inspired vindicator of the truth of God, his pen is governed by a higher law than that of personal kindness. There was a reason for this exposure, both immediate and remote. To disabuse the minds of those to whom he writes is, of course, his first and may possibly have been his only conscious wish; but He who guided him in what he wrote, meant *us* also to have knowledge of

³ *Notes on 2 Corinthians*, chaps. viii. ix.

⁴ "Cephas" is the reading preferred by the best authorities both here and in verse 14.

⁵ 1 Cor. vii. 6; xiii. 6, 7.

these things, that from the second fall of Simon son of Jonas the lesson of the unaltered frailty and vanity of the flesh, even in a man miraculously endowed and empowered as Peter was, might be thus strikingly exemplified for our warning and our comfort also. If distinctive virtues show themselves, it can only be by contrast; and Paul's fidelity and spiritual quick-sightedness here find their sad occasion of display. But is it the mind of the Spirit to lead us, on this or any other ground, to set Paul upon a permanently higher moral level in our estimation than his fellow-servant?

I answer this question first by a general negative, and make next the assertion (which I hope to be able to prove clearly from Scripture) that *both* those much-honoured vessels, each fit in his vocation for the Master's use, were, like other inspired men who went before them in the race of faith and patience, tried severally and found personally wanting; and, further, that the crisis of their failure appears in each instance to have been created by themselves. Peter is said to have "come to Antioch;" but there is no intimation, here or elsewhere, that he undertook this journey by divine direction. He was the apostle of the circumcision; and the express terms of the recent compact entered into at Jerusalem were "that he should go to the circumcision." What brought him, then, to Antioch, a Gentile capital, and the place which the Holy Ghost had made, as it were, the centre of His general mission to the Gentiles? He scarcely seems, there, in his natural place, though we may venture, on the other hand, to affirm that it was no ground of blame to him, if a desire to view with

his own eyes the work of which he heard when at Jerusalem had led him to return at Antioch Paul's earlier visit to himself. Yet in doing so he went into a place of danger, as the sequel showed. In like manner Paul, long after he had entered on his proper mission to the Gentiles, forms in his spirit a resolution to revisit Jerusalem;⁶ undertaking with that view a service which less obviously claimed his care as an apostle.⁷ Forbidden, when far advanced upon his journey, to proceed, by an express injunction of the Holy Ghost,⁸ who multiplied, moreover, His dissuasive testimony at divers stages of his route,⁹ he disregards these obstacles, and carries out his purpose to the end; gaining his wish, however, only to taste as its first fruit the humiliation of discomfiture and just rebuke. Exposed in the first instance to a temptation which he had not encountered in the clear path of duty, he plays the part before the haters of the gospel, not as Peter and John had done in earlier days, of a fearless and distinct confessor of the name of Jesus Christ, but, after failing in temper under the injurious provocation of his judge, has recourse to a temporary compromise of truth, in order to divide the power and defeat the malice of his adversaries.¹

Such examples are recorded for our sakes rather than for theirs; the Spirit of truth thus warning us

⁶ Acts xix. 21.

⁷ Rom. xv. 25.

⁸ Acts xxi. 4.

⁹ Acts xx. 23; xxi. 11.

¹ Acts xxiii. 3-6. That the Lord (of whom no mention is made as the director of this eventful journey) stood by him and consoled him in the season of his deep distress, proves touchingly His own fidelity and grace, but by no means countenances the conclusion that Paul's purpose was originally *right*.

against imagining of men in any case beyond what is written, and condemning by anticipation that tendency to idolize God's instruments and ministers, to the obscuring of the true light of His own glory in the face of Jesus Christ, which has wrought and works still so mightily for evil in the Church of God. To return from this digression.

Verse 12. "For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles," &c. There is something truly astonishing in the conduct here ascribed to Cephas. After reading the account of the conversion of Cornelius, and the clear and solemn testimony borne by the chosen opener of God's kingdom to the Gentiles in the presence of the assembly at Jerusalem, that God had put no difference between the Gentiles and themselves;² remembering also that many years before he had reduced to silence those who contended with him at Jerusalem for eating with the uncircumcised,³ to find him shaming now at Antioch his former good confession by so base and unworthy a compliance is, in truth, a sorrowful surprise. But let no Christian reader limit his emotion to surprise, but learn rather for his soul's profit through this illustrious example of inconsistency—that commonest of Christian faults—the deep necessity of constant watching unto prayer. And if in Peter's writings we may expect to find a mirror of his experimental feelings as a chosen shepherd of the flock, it is natural to connect morally the warning which he has left us against the sleepless adversary⁴ of our souls, with his own discomfiture through his subtlety as recorded in this place.

² Acts xv. 9. ³ Acts xi. 3-18. ⁴ 1 Peter v. 8.

The immediate occasion of Peter's tergiversation was, we are told, the arrival at Antioch of "certain from James." Comparing this fact with the very doubtful counsel given by the latter apostle to Paul, on his subsequent visit to Jerusalem, it seems difficult to avoid the conclusion that the habitual tone of feeling in his own mind and those of his ministerial associates was far short of that thoroughness of identification, in the newness of the Spirit, with their Gentile brethren in the faith, which was indeed recognized in the abstract, and had been, under divine direction, acted on at the crisis described in Acts xv.; but which had been received down to that time with varying degrees of intelligent heartiness on the part of God's several witnesses of the circumcision. Paul held it firmly, preached it as a necessary part of his gospel, and asserted it, as in the present instance, with uncompromising zeal. It was indeed the completeness of his own emancipation from the yoke of bondage that enabled him to make, not perhaps always wisely, concessions for love's sake to his brethren after the flesh. Peter both owned and enjoyed it, but with an undecided mind; regarding it, as his conduct would imply, rather as an allowable and welcome privilege than as the established law of peace and liberty within God's house. Hence human influence could unsettle and disturb him, and even deter him from the exercise of a liberty which, though solemnly vindicated by him as a right, had, strange to say, no rooted and established claim upon his conscience as a necessary part of his *obedience to God*. James, on the other hand, and those whom he guided at Jerusalem, seem to have felt in much

feebler measure the true power of that which they had heard and seen, and conscientiously approved. A worthier appreciation of the grace and glory of Him in whom both are made one would have doubtless rendered all such questionings impossible; but we have here an example of that slowness of heart, so common to us all (and which lies often as a burden of astonishment on the self-judging believer), to discern and hold, in an abiding and soul-engrossing remembrance, the manner of that love which the Father hath bestowed upon us in His Son. They were *Jews* still, in the spirit of their minds, though Christian Jews; weak, therefore, and prone to judge in others things which, if looking upward and not downward, they would not censure, but applaud.⁵

It is plain that for a long time after the first beginning of the work of God among the nations, Jewish and Gentile converts were shuffled together rather than cordially united as children of the common light. To banish from both alike their native sense of difference, by keeping constantly before their hearts the cross and glory of the Son of God, was the lifelong labour of St. Paul, and, according to their measure of grace, of the apostles of the circumcision also. To perpetuate it was, of course, the policy of Satan, and manifold were his devices to that end. Yet, if this were all, our interest in these historical records would be comparatively little, nor would God have sent down to us such testimonies of the early strivings of His Spirit with the spirit of error, had the contest been of a transitory nature only. But it continues still. The spirit of Judaism has survived

⁵ Rom. xiv. 3, *seq.*

its name in the nominal assembly of God's saints; and to this hour the fear or false influence of man is operating not less effectively than it did of old, as a standing hindrance to the gracious liberty of God. That sectarian differences live and flourish, even among true Christians, is a proof of the plainest and saddest kind that man has far more practical authority than God within the assembly which is called by His name, and wherever this spirit exists it carries with it the same moral badge. Its love is with dissimulation, and its wisdom with partiality. That which by riper and more Christ-filled hearts is furtively, or at least exceptionally, acknowledged and enjoyed is practically contradicted by the form and habit of the sect. Christ is not *all* in such associations, though through grace He may be *much*; and thus the manifestation of God's building in its unity is methodically interrupted and indefinitely postponed, while human tradition or example rules where the Spirit of truth should be supreme.⁶

⁶ Far be it from me to speak or write against the honest efforts or desires of godly men. But truth is of *God*, and its claims are above all other pleas. An "evangelical alliance" may be instrumentally a means of mercy and blessing in a day of spiritual disorder and confusion; but is it not also, and that in a pre-eminent degree, a publication of sectarian sin? A *distinctive* Christian (Churchman or other denominationalist) bears a double character. He is a believer by the grace of God, and therefore a member of His Church; but he is a sectary by voluntary choice, and therefore a denier, in position and practice, of the oneness of God's spiritual house. The Holy Ghost condemns divisions, while admitting their historical necessity. (1 Cor. xi. 18, 19.) An obedient faith disclaims them in the spirit of confession; seeking still from discovered evil to the God that judges it. But an alliance which is based on the mutual recognition and general maintenance of sectarian standing, is a boastful exhibition of disorder instead of a con-

Verse 13. "And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him," &c. Evil communications corrupt good manners, and bad example in a leader never fails of its effect. If not resisted promptly and resolutely in the power of truth, it multiplies iniquity in proportion to the personal weight and credit of the first delinquent. When Peter ate with Gentiles he was not alone in that good confession of the truth. When the fear of man betrayed him into the humiliating self-contradiction which followed, those who had been bold through his first example, beyond the measure of their faith, turned back without reluctance to a course more congenial to their natural sympathies and habits. But the difficulty of resisting successfully a false movement which has been initiated by a venerable name is most strikingly and painfully exemplified in Barnabas. That "a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost," one who had discovered on an earlier occasion so ready and decided an appreciation of the grace of God, as a thing superior to Jewish form and habit—nay, who had himself been a chief helper of the work of God at Antioch—should practice hypocrisy and deal partially and unkindly with those whom he had before rejoiced to own as brethren beloved, may well excite our wondering regret. But let us judge this matter soberly and wisely, and with an especial reference to

trite avowal of it. But can such glorying be "good" in the eyes of Him who died to make His people one? Great is His long-suffering, and marvellous are His workings, in the sovereign power of His grace, but the blessing of a full reward is for those who cleave wholly to the Lord, and refuse to mingle what is human with His words.

ourselves, remembering that human failure of any kind is but our own portrait in another light.

There is a weak point in the character of every saint, and in that of Barnabas natural amiability and an affectionate partiality of disposition appear to have been the principal impediments to his efficiency as an uncompromising as well as tender-hearted minister of God. At the bidding of the latter sentiment he consented to dissolve his operative partnership with Paul,⁷ while the former quality appears to have prevailed on this memorable occasion against the nobler and truer instincts of his faith. Let none think that he stands or can stand as an upright servant of the truth by any other power than *immediate* faith in Christ. But where was Christ in this sad question? Could the motives and feelings here described have lived and wrought their mischievous effects had *He* been holding at the time His proper place in the remembrance of these men? Yet they whose unlovely conduct is thus openly exhibited for our admonition by the Spirit are not less generally worthy, for their work's sake, of our loving admiration, and our humble imitation also. Happy they who, warned and instructed by their failure, while escaping the like danger, emulate their general faith.

Verse 14. "But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter," &c. We have already considered the doctrinal force and value of "the truth of the gospel;" we have now to regard it, though by painful contrast, in its moral aspect, as the rule and motive of a Christian's walk. Simplicity and godly sincerity are

⁷ Acts xv. 39.

the natural fruits of truth in the inward parts; dissimulation and insincerity are certain consequences of a departure in heart from the living God. All went well at Antioch while Christ alone was occupying the hearts and minds both of the teachers and the taught. It was the intrusion of the leaven of natural, and therefore obsolete, claims and influences into the new lump of spiritual association that wrought with such swift and destructively injurious effect.

And was Paul's eye alone open to discern so flagrant a perversion of the truth? The Gentile believers, who were reluctantly preparing to pay the price of an insincere conformity to Jewish manners, in order to retain the once free benefit of Christian fellowship, may have had a deeper and holier feeling of distress than a mere sense of personal grievance; but it is probable that Paul only saw clearly, and with a full apprehension of the peril to which the gospel of Christ was thus exposed, the real bearing of this movement. And if a natural reason is to be sought for to explain in part so wide a difference of sentiment and conduct in the case of men so similar in respect of personal devotedness, it may easily be found. Neither Cephas nor Barnabas had learnt yet, as Paul had learnt it, the intrinsic contrariety of the spirit of Judaism to the Spirit of Christ. Simon the son of Jonas had known Christ after the flesh, and had to be weaned gradually from the old wine to the new. Joses again had received the gospel as a Levite, and though fresh named by the apostles, who rejoiced at the rich outshining from him of the grace of God,⁸ had rather grown out of legal trammels by the enlarg-

⁸ Acts iv. 36, 37.

ing of his heart through the sweet savour of the grace of Christ, than abandoned them deliberately as things incompatible with true gospel liberty ; to be left behind therefore and forgotten, as the trappings of the dead, by the risen man in Christ as a runner in the new and heavenly race of life. Both knew and loved the saving truth of God ; but neither Cephas nor Barnabas had persecuted the faith, nor felt intelligently its positive contrariety to the "former conversation." All three found redemption only at the cross of Christ ; but to Paul was first discovered, in its full extent of meaning, what he here calls the truth of the gospel—the doctrine, that is, of the complete cessation of the "old man," whether Jew or Gentile, at the cross, and the consequent antagonism, necessary and complete, between the oldness of the letter and the newness of the Spirit in its absolute sense.

Explanation of wrong doing differs widely from *excuse*. What Paul saw the others also should have seen, and shrank from as it were instinctively. For Peter, as we have seen, had long before perceived, and that by a miraculous instruction, that God is no respecter of persons ; and Barnabas had outrun Paul himself in his desire to impart to the uncircumcised the free and rich blessing of the gospel. But it is to Peter, as the chief in place and honour, and the first therefore in blame, both on that account and because the defection had originated with himself, that the inspired remonstrance is addressed : which, beginning with the direct personal appeal contained in the latter half of this verse, is continued, with a more general application, through the remainder of the chapter. The offence was private and personal in

form, but its consequences, if unresisted, would have been of wide and general effect. With a just estimate, therefore, both of the sin and of the public danger to the faith which it involved, Paul rebukes his elder comrade before all, exemplifying thus beforehand the rule of censure afterwards added by his own pen to the written word of God.⁹

Verses 15, 16. "We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles," &c. His words in the first of these verses are necessarily retrospective, and are a statement in brief of that covenanted superiority of the Jew to the Gentile, as touching the flesh, which is more elaborately insisted on in Romans iii., and attested throughout the scriptures. Honour and advantage belong always to the Jew, whenever men are regarded by the Spirit as dwellers upon earth. Israel is by prophetic description "the righteous nation," to whom the doors of salvation are first opened, and who are hereafter to be God's anointed teachers of righteousness among the isles of the Gentiles to the utmost limits of Messiah's realm.¹ God's nation must be such, when brought into its rights. But those rights are of grace, not of debt, and Israel is in bondage still,—an empty vine, seeking fruit from himself, not in the Lord, and not obtaining what he seeks because he seeks it not by faith.² Meanwhile the election hath obtained. The apostle, taking up in this personal way the question of law and grace, addresses Peter in language suited to the case, because expressive of the true, though much

⁹ 1 Tim. v. 19, 20.

¹ Isa. xxvi. 2; lxvi. 19.

² Hos. x. 1; Rom. ix. 31.

abused, distinction which the call of Abraham and the subsequent giving of the law had established between the circumcision and the Gentiles. And it is well for us believers of the uncircumcision to keep fresh in our remembrance the wholesome though humiliating fact that, apart from a living faith in Christ, "sinners of the Gentiles" is our natural and true description. It is a title of dishonour, which faith changes for a new and enduring name of praise, but which cleaves still to the families of the earth as such, and will do so until the once-rejected of Jacob's rulers shall have returned with mercies to Jerusalem, and the kings of the earth pay a willing and adoring homage at the footstool of the Lord.³

These Jews by nature were not sinners of the Gentiles, but they had learnt through divine teaching a much deeper truth. They had become aware of their personally helpless and hopeless state as Jehovah's debtors by the law, and of the utter vanity and delusiveness consequently of external Jewish privilege. They knew that the national promise was vacated,⁴ and that what should have been their crown of honour was become their yoke of degradation. They had both learnt the same lesson, though by different means; and the terms in which this common knowledge is here expressed deserve our attentive consideration, as they seem to put in a clear light the true relation of law to grace in its subjective aspect—"Knowing," he says, "that man is not justified by works of law, except through faith of Jesus Christ, we also believed on Jesus Christ,

³ Zech. i. 16; Ps. xcix. 5.

⁴ Exod. xix. 8.

that we might be justified by faith of Jesus Christ, and not by works of law."⁵

The first thing to be here noticed is the force of the word "man." To learn its full significance, both for shame and glory, God's people are instructed first by law, and finally by grace. Without now insisting on the solemnly interesting and, in reality, *conclusive* fact that the sentence of personal rejection was passed upon the first Adam, and that the promised Seed became thenceforward the sole hope of a race derived from a fallen and dishonoured head, or reviewing here the earlier history of our kind, we may confine our attention to that people whose ennobling distinction it was that to them were committed the oracles of God.⁶

The Jew, then, is a child of Adam, separated from the common family of mankind for the eventual benefit of the rest, through their learning and diffusion of the true knowledge of God.⁷ But the honour of his covenant election as the natural seed of Abraham turns to shame from the moment that the true power of God's law is felt in his own soul. Expecting to be justified by works of law, he seeks, while the time of his natural darkness lasts, to establish his own righteousness; but when the law's converting power⁸ is really experienced, his dream of

⁵ εἰδότες ὅτι οὐ δικαιοῦται ἄνθρωπος ἐξ ἔργων νόμου, ἐὰν μὴ διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, καὶ ἡμεῖς, εἰς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν ἐπιστεύσαμεν, ἵνα δικαιωθῶμεν ἐκ πίστεως Χριστοῦ, καὶ οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων νόμου.

⁶ Rom. iii. 1, 2.

⁷ Deut. iv. 6, *seq.*; Ps. lxvii.

⁸ Ps. xix. 7. A converting power is attributed both to the law and to the gospel, but with a characteristic difference. In both cases the soul is turned from itself to God; but in the former a

self-justification is dispelled, and the true nature and effect of sin is discovered to his conscience. Now the law, as the apostle tells us, is *spiritual*, and therefore indestructible.⁹ It may rest in the holy peace of its fulfilment, but while unfulfilled must be the dread as well as longing of the quickened soul.¹

Hence justification by faith, though in the manner of it totally opposed to justification by works, so that the righteousness of God is now made manifest "apart from law" to the believer in Christ crucified,² yet because it is by faith of Him who is the end and fulfilling of the law that men are justified, it involves in itself the full virtue of a legal righteousness as well; the righteousness of the law being fulfilled in them that are "in Christ" through faith, and who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.³ And this appears to be the true force of the apostle's language here. He does not say, as he often does elsewhere, that man is not justified by works, but by faith simply; but that he is not justified by works of law, "*except* through faith of Jesus Christ;"⁴ that faith receiving as its portion, not only a clearance from all legal blame, but by imputation the positive merit also of that righteousness of law which, *described*

sense of unfulfilled legal responsibility renders Him an object of terror not less than of hope. In the latter, God becomes in Christ the refuge and hiding-place of the converted soul.

⁹ Rom. vii. 14.

¹ Ps. cxix. *passim*.

² *Ante*, page 63, notè.

³ Rom. viii. 4.

⁴ Such is the natural force of the words *ἐὰν μὴ διὰ π. I. X.* as contrasted with *ἐκ πίστεως Χ.* It would be possible to justify the Authorized Version only on the assumption of a large ellipsis: "Man is not justified by works of law" (and therefore not justified at all), "except by faith of Jesus Christ." But the remainder of the verse, as it stands in the original, appears to forbid this.

by Moses, is *found* only in the man Christ Jesus, and with the rest of His personal perfections carried to the account of those who have by grace their redemption and their acceptance equally *in Him*. It is by the obedience of One, as the same witness testifies, that the many are made righteous;⁵ language which, while harmonizing perfectly with the fundamental doctrine of sacrificial atonement, invites us to consider, not the definitive act of dying only, by which the Son of God brought to its predestined close the course of His obedience here below, but the proved personal merit also of the Man who gave *Himself*, and all that He had shown Himself to be, for our sins.

It is thus that the elect Jew's natural cleaving to the law becomes harmonized with his justifying faith in Jesus Christ, in which also it merges finally and disappears, as he grows in his knowledge of the true God and eternal life.⁶ As the law's condemnation was his shame once, and the confusion of his face, so the Lord, who is the consummation of the law for righteousness, is now his glory and the uplifting of his head. Those who believed Moses loved indeed the law, but could not live on it. The word of promise was from age to age their sure, though far off, gospel of salvation. We shall see in the following chapter in what manner the apostle has treated in full the question of guilt and its removal. In the passage now before us the doctrine of the cross is presented in the most general and comprehensive terms. Works do not justify, faith does. But the Object of that faith is Christ, the true Mediator. Law once stood,

⁵ Rom. v. 19.

⁶ 1 John v. 20.

in the unsatisfied fulness of its claims, as a barrier of exclusion between God and man; but from that place it has been lawfully removed by its fulfilment, not by its repeal. The tables of stone, fit emblems both of its own unrelenting character, and also of the intrinsic strength and stability of that Man who should perfectly discharge its claims, have disappeared for ever. The vail of separation is now done away in Christ. Law is not *dead*, but has changed, in its living fulfilment, both its aspect and its name. Because it is spiritual it cannot die, but for the believer its ancient function is no more. No longer enmity, it is, in Christ, a part of that "great peace" which is the eternal portion of them that, in the spirit of a justifying faith, serve still with their minds the law of God.⁷ For its justice is laid, in the bosom of the Saviour, to an everlasting rest; its ordinances, which were against them that sought in them their own righteousness, but which had their true and ultimate respect to Him of whom Moses spake, are nailed, as vacated obligations and as conquered trophies, to the ever-blessed cross of our redemption.⁸

Believing man is thus justified, whether circumcised or uncircumcised, by a faith which finds its object in the crucified and now exalted Lord of glory. Joined to their gracious Surety in His death, His shame for their sakes is become their beauty and their boast: they glory in His cross. Quickened and raised with Him by faith, and rejoicing in Him only as their righteousness and strength, they walk before Jehovah and behold His goodness in the land of the

⁷ Ps. cxix. 165; Rom. vii. 25. ⁸ Col. ii. 14.

living.⁹ The cords of death were once on Jesus for our sakes; but the hand of eternal justice which had bound them, loosed them also in due time, and that for His sake and for ours. It was not *meet* that righteousness should be the lasting prey of death. It was not *possible* that God's own holy One—His very and eternal Son—should die like one of the princes, and lie helplessly among the slain. Having lived as none other lived, He died also as none other died. If Israel's mighty One delivered His strength into the captivity of the grave, when He died once for all unto sin for our sakes, it was in order to its triumphant re-assertion when He arose and went on high. Bound or loose, He is the changeless truth of God, consenting willingly to death and all its horrible accessories, as the appointed Lamb of God, but reviving, when His flesh had fulfilled its allotted term of hopeful rest,¹ in the unaltered majesty of His person as the Resurrection and the Life. In Him hereafter shall all the seed of Israel be justified and shall glory.² In Him also shall the Gentiles trust, with a confidence that maketh not ashamed.³ Meanwhile He is the present righteousness and hope of glory to those vessels of elective mercy whom God now is calling, by His gospel, from among the nations of the world.

Verse 17. "But if, while seeking to be justified in Christ,⁴ we ourselves also are found sinners, is Christ therefore the minister of sin? God forbid." Their minds might well recoil from the conclusion, yet such is a faithful and unexaggerated statement of

⁹ Psalm cxvi. 9. ¹ Acts ii. 25, *seq.* ² Isaiah xlv. 25.

³ Rom. xv. 12; 1 Peter ii. 6.

⁴ ἐν Χριστῷ.

the dilemma into which all those are cast who mingle in their thoughts and teaching law and grace. The point of the apostle's question lies in the contrast and irreconcilable distinction between the subjects respectively of the old covenant and the new. Children of *Adam*—the seed of Abraham after the flesh—are contemplated and reckoned with in the former; *Christ*, and the children whom God has given to Him, in the latter. It is as if Paul thus addressed his fellow-servant: We once turned, as you know, and that for the weightiest of reasons, from ourselves to Christ, to seek in *Him* our justification before God. But if, as you imply by now shunning Gentile fellowship, we are to retain still our previous standing and responsibilities as Jews by nature, we return again virtually from Christ to ourselves, and are found, as all our fathers were, still sinners in the sight of God. But we *believed in Jesus Christ* for justification before God. What place, then, has this object of our faith in our eyes and hearts, and to what purpose is our faith itself? Did God, let me ask, really send His Son into the world to rivet only and perpetuate the ancient bondage? Is Christ, who died as our Redeemer from that yoke, as Moses was, the minister of sin?⁵ Impossible, you will say; His very name forbids the thought; for He was named from the womb the Saviour of His people from their sins. Nay, but it is so, if your attempted compromise of law and gospel is to stand.

⁵ The true force of this expression will be better understood on a consideration of the apostle's reasoning in 2 Cor. iii.—*Notes on 2 Cor. in loc.*

Verse 18. "For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor." Assuming, from his change of style, that these words are addressed more directly to the Galatian churches, his argument is continued in the following strain:⁶ Do you not see, my brethren, that the doctrine of the cross, if of any true effect on its recipients, is necessarily destructive of all works and counsels of the natural man? The point I am handling is one of intense personal interest; I speak therefore in the first person, in defence of this all-important topic of the common faith. For my own part, then, I disallowed the claims of Moses when I came to Christ, for the law's dominion must expire with its subject's life. Now the manner of my faith was in Christ *crucified*. All that the law did for me was to elate me for a season with a false estimate of my position, until a knowledge of its spiritual force and meaning turned my imagined privileges into hopeless penalties; and with a divinely opened eye I fled with my evil conscience to the cross of Him who bore my sins in His own body on the tree. My heavy and intolerable burden left me there. Did I then break the law by acting thus? Nay, but consenting to it, I sought refuge from its claims where alone its righteousness is truly found and magnified; where also it is proffered freely to the contrite and be-

⁶ It is not easy to say positively where Paul's direct remonstrance ends, but I am disposed to limit it to the four preceding verses, and to suppose that, without addressing the Galatians again by name, he utters what follows to the end of this chapter in a more general tone, explaining and vindicating, for their sakes and ours, his own doctrine and conversation as a faithful minister of Christ.

believing sinner as a part of the fulness that is in Jesus Christ. But the duty of *legal service* I renounced for ever, in favour of the liberty with which the Son makes free, and of the new service, in the Spirit of the living God, to which believers are now called.

Now I perceive that you are captivated by the presumed advantages of circumcision, and would have my sanction and concurrence with your wish. But this is to me impossible. For if I acted still on merely Jewish principles, I should be re-asserting, to my own confusion, the very thing which I before renounced. By consenting, as a *Christian*, to distinctions in the flesh, I stultify my own confession and make myself, in a double sense and hopelessly, a *transgressor*. For if the law's claims on a believer's conscience are still good, I transgressed it when I ceased from legal works in order to be justified by faith. If, on the other hand, the law's dominion ended with my reception and confession of the Son of God, an attempt to resuscitate the enmity which Christ has slain (and to recognize the validity of Jewish ordinances is nothing less than this) would render me a transgressor not of the old covenant only, but also of the new. Sure footing, on such a supposition, I have none. If Christ is sufficient, I dishonour Him by returning to the law. If the law has still its ancient force, then assuredly I continue in my sins though Christ be risen from the dead. But God gives me, in the gospel of His Son, a better lot and surer standing ground than this.

Verse 19. "For through the law I died to the law,⁷ that I might live unto God." The law itself

⁷ ἐγὼ γὰρ διὰ νόμον νόμῳ ἀπέθανον.

has been my liberator from its heavy yoke. The verse now before us is a condensed expression of the doctrine stated more explicitly in Romans vii. 4. "Ye died," he there says, "my brethren, to the law *by the body of Christ*, that ye might be married to another, even to Him that is risen from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God." The point of the teaching in both passages is the same, and it is this, that neither life nor fruit to God is compatible with a legal conscience, because such is in every case an *evil* conscience. The death which the law denounces against sin must first be passed, before the service of the living God can be truly undertaken on our parts. Dead to sin and alive to God, through faith in the death and resurrection of the Lord, is the proper description of a believer who has not believed in vain.⁸ The curse of the law, as he expressly tells us farther on,⁹ was cancelled for us at the cross of Christ; but his language here is much more comprehensive in its brevity, as well as most triumphantly emphatic in its terms. "Through law I died to law," he says, meaning, as the next verse clearly shows, when Jesus died. If sin slew me, as it did, by the commandment,¹ I found in death another whom sin did *not* slay, although by the Father's will, and of His own free love and grace, He died to sin. In Him who lives again, and is alive for ever, I now live to God. And so he continues,

Verse 20. "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live," &c. Let us consider well the force and

⁸ Rom. vi. 11; 1 Cor. xv. 2. ⁹ *Infra*, chap. iii. 13.

¹ Rom. vii. 2.

import of this declaration, which is not more emphatic and conclusive as a doctrinal statement than it is both searching and encouraging as an utterance of deeply experimental faith. For faith differs from what is mental assent only by this very token, that it puts itself in spirit where its own blessed Object was in the doing of His gracious work; cleaving, not to the doctrine of substitution only, but much more to the *person* of the substituted Lamb of God. And it is the heart-language of one who tells forth what by grace he truly *knows*, that meets us in this verse.

A shameful death is the transgressor's just reward, and it was in company with such that Jesus died. The three crosses upon Calvary are a pattern through all time of the mediate relation of self-sacrificing and redeeming love, to faith or unbelief on either side. For that which men call "natural death" is as truly God's penalty on our *sin*, as a judicial execution is man's recompence for *crime*. But in a yet more exact and literal sense the malefactors who were punished with the Just One represent with fidelity the entire race of man. For not only is it true that all sinned when Adam sinned, and that since their individual birth all mortals have transgressed in divers ways, but specifically all are *thieves*. That His own peculiar nation robbed Him, priest and people alike, is one of the last of the long roll of Jehovah's charges against them, by His prophets' lips. And it is surely not less evident that such honour as the Gentiles render, either to their idols or themselves, is fraudulently taken from the true and only God. For all have

sinned and come short of the glory of God; none rendering his due to the Creator, who had formed his image for Himself, and all, to His damage and dishonour, seeking in rebellious selfishness "their own." Of Christ's companions in death, one, by the special grace of God, confessed the merit of his sentence and the personal excellency of the Lord of glory who was hanging by his side; dying a willing and a joyful death, as a forgiven sinner, and lifted far above his natural shame and agony by the blissful assurance of passing straightway into Paradise with Christ. The other, with no such confession on his lips, and with his heart full of unrepentant bitterness, died only because he was obliged to die.

We have, therefore, in the apostle's language here much more than a confession of the cross as the alone and effectual power of deliverance for the believer from the wrath to come. Most truly it is the power of God to salvation for all who by His grace look on it with the eye of faith. But we are weighing now the words, not of a recently emancipated sinner, but of a ripe and divinely-inspired saint. It is not a confessing unto righteousness only of the name and personal glory of Him who suffered for us in the flesh, but an arming of himself likewise with the same mind.² It is faith's deliberate and good confession as, in the spirit of responsive and appropriative love, it casts itself absolutely and without reserve upon its ever blessed Object. It is a going forth to Him without the camp, to be willingly *with* Him as He was graciously *for* us, claiming thus as his distinctive honour the burden of his Lord's re-

² 1 Peter iv. 1.

proach. It is a knitting of soul to soul, a giving of himself to Christ as Christ gave Himself for our sins, the surrender of a grateful and adoring love to a higher, and unmeasured, and creative love. In declaring that he is crucified with Christ, Paul answers only for himself. For, though every true believer may be said to have come as a natural man to his end, having died judicially before God when our common and ever-blessed Substitute gave up the ghost, an instructed faith alone can use worthily this form of speech. Yet his words will surely find an echo in each genuine disciple's heart. For, if the Lord of glory gave His face to shame and spitting, and His sacred body to the tree, for our sakes, the least that a sincere love on our parts can do is to place ourselves in spirit by the Sufferer's side. The shame which He despised, because it was with hands washed in innocence that He took the burden of our guilt upon Himself, accomplishing His sacrificial work in the spotless garment of His native holiness,³ we ought to claim as our *own*; accepting joyfully the place of outcasts in the estimation of the world, because of the deep and endless consolation of His love.

"I am crucified with Christ," he says. But if so, his own proper life as a child of the first Adam is definitively at an end; for no man can survive himself. But though dead, he speaks on still, to witness of a life above his own, which yet, by grace, is his completely and for ever. "I *live*," he continues; "yet not I, but Christ lives in me." It will be noticed that resurrection is implied only, not expressed. Death, which had dominion over Christ for its allotted

³ Psalm xxvi. 6; Heb. vii. 27.

season, meets its own abolition in its victory, and yields finally to life, for its Victim has become its plagues.⁴ The point of the apostle's declaration is to insist here on what he elsewhere calls the "mystery of the faith;"⁵ that the fact—namely, of the Lord's death for us—when apprehended in the spirit of a sound and healthy faith, so truly terminates the *natural* career of the believer, that his life thenceforth is not himself, but Christ. His faith thus contradicts his old nature at all points. The life of the latter he denies by the former, and regards it, spite of his unaltered natural consciousness, as verily extinct and ended before God. But if Christ lives in him, it is as the hope of glory and the power of separation from the world, as well as of acceptable service in His name. Christ's heart was on the joy before Him when He bore the cross, and it was in view of the glory which the Father had to give that He wrought in humiliation the full service of His will. And His walk, with its animating motive, should be ours also who are called to follow Him.⁶ Let us attend meanwhile to the rest of the apostle's words:

"And the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me." We have here, be it observed, no question of final security, but a descriptive explanation of a Christian's daily life and walk, the principle and motive-spring of which are both dis-

⁴ Rom. vi. 9; 2 Tim. i. 10; Hosea xiii. 14.

⁵ 1 Timothy iii. 9, where note the pointed reference to *conscience*; the doctrine of pure grace being so easily susceptible of abuse. Compare 1 Tim. i. 19.

⁶ 1 John ii. 6; John xii. 26.

tinctly shown. The man who lives is still experimentally "in the flesh," but the life which he lives is both out of and above His natural self, for he both lives and walks *by faith*. When flesh and its claims were remembered by the apostle of the circumcision, it caused, as we have seen, a shameful interruption and a temporary contradiction of his previously upright walk. What preserved Paul from the like error was his more thorough realization of the newness and separateness of his life and standing as a man in Christ. We are shown in his case an example of a lively and effective, because Christ-fed, faith, as distinguished from a faith which, though right as to its object, is weak and stumbling in effect, through a mingling of vain traditions with "the sincere milk of the word," which is its proper food. Christ holds now, in his heart and mind, the place which was held in the days of his legal bondage by himself. It is Paul who lives, breathes, thinks and acts; but, by the grace of God, he does these things without any reference to himself or his own ends. Carried back in spirit to the cross as the alone ground and reason of his hope, and willingly abiding in adoring meditation of the love which there greets him in its full display, his language is according to his faith. He died when his Saviour died; he lives, in the light and power of His resurrection from the dead, as a glad confessor of the absolute and never-ending claims of this redeeming love upon his soul. It is the excellency of the name and person of the almighty Lover of his soul that commands and fills the mind and heart of the apostle, rather than the magnitude of the salvation which He wrought. It is *the Son*

of God whose love he boasts; his glorying is such, therefore, as becomes the spirit of a prostrate worshipper.⁷ His liberator is his *Lord*, as well as his redemption and his life, and by His Spirit has possession and mastery of Paul's mortal flesh; subduing its wills to the dominion of His own good pleasure, and leading him in a joyfully consenting bondage by the cords of His exceeding love.

The confession of the apostle's faith and practice here set before us in a form so condensed and forcible, and with a weight proportioned to its brevity, is more amply shown forth in a variety of other passages,⁸ the general effect of which is to put in contrast the true doctrine of life and godliness with the specious, but unprofitable and delusive, dreams of legalism. There is in each case labour, and a running to obtain; but the principle of the one is self-love, of the other the constraining love of Christ. The intensest, as well as the most subtle, form of self-love is religious zeal apart from the knowledge of the truth. The death of self-love is the cross of Christ, when viewed by the contrite believer as the direct outflowing of the love to us-ward of the Son of God. In the presence and assurance of this love Paul's natural and acquired gains were, in his estimation, as a thing abhorred.⁹

And now, if some lowly-minded reader, of weak faith, should hesitate, whilst assenting to the equally marvellous, though general, statement made at the opening of this epistle,¹ and approving Paul's bold-

⁷ John ix. 38.

⁸ 2 Cor. iv. 10-14; Phil. i. 20, *seq.*, iii. 7, *seq.*, &c., &c.

⁹ Phil. iii. 7, 8.

¹ "Who gave Himself for *our sins*." (Chap. i. 4.)

ness in thus claiming as his own the love of Christ, to say in his own person, and with an equally courageous application, "who loved *me*, and gave Himself for *me*," I would say to such: "Why hesitate to give due honour to both love and truth?" You do not, when confessing sin, feel any difficulty in the use of appropriative words. Nay, on the compulsion of conscience, you must say, "*my* sins." You realize easily and mournfully the truth of the Spirit's verdict against the native evil of your heart, and individualize without an effort your personal relation to the Judge of all. But the same Spirit who convinces you of sin bears witness also to the saving righteousness of God in Christ. And you believe the Scriptures, and confess that Jesus is the Son of God—the Saviour. Shall faith, then, in your case be less positive than conscience? Remember that nothing but a free and absolute, as well as merciful and righteous, love could ever save the guilty and the lost; and that if the love of God in Christ is generally towards men as men, it has also its special claims on each of those who come under its gracious power through the gospel. What, therefore, on a merely natural consideration would be *madness*, is but the sobriety of a dutiful confession in the case of a sincere believer. Fervour of affection grows with faith, and the lips are bolder as the heart is filled.

Right reason also lends its aid to faith. "He loved me:" thus might an earnest and heart-questioning believer parley with himself, when pondering Paul's declaration of his faith. Fit words these for the elect vessel, but how know *I* this? "He gave Himself for me." Allowed, in Paul's case, but what *proof* of

this for me? *He died upon the cross, after having been forsaken of His God.* Ah, here indeed, if life be in him, he will say, I touch firm ground. For, myself being judge, *I* ought, as a transgressor, to be treated thus. That I am a child of wrath by nature is a truth that God has written, not in His book only, but now also on my heart. My conscious self-knowledge reaches fully to this point, and need not go beyond it. With other men's liabilities I do not interfere, but of this I am sure, that if God deals with *me* in strict and simple justice, I am hopelessly condemned. What Paul knew and acknowledged, as a child of Adam, I know also, and his confession is the sincere language of my heart. I am surely chief among sinners, and unworthy to be numbered with God's saints.² But Jesus died upon the cross. Love only to the guilty could have put God's holy One in such a place, and the place He took I recognize as mine. For I know that I am guilty, and that He is pure. This, then, is enough. He loved *me*, and gave Himself for *me*. Faith may stagger as it feels the full weight of such a truth, but it will carry and still cleave to it, until as a burden it is forgotten and worn only as a crown.

Paul's language in this memorable passage is not apostolic or peculiar, but *spiritual* only: fit therefore for the lips of all who are of God. It is a natural expression of the faith which confesses, with understanding in its words, that Jesus is the Son of God. For to know Him is to be *persuaded* of His love; and when *this* is tasted and continued in men *live*. Their

² 1 Tim. i. 15; Eph. iii. 8.

actions will then have about them the savour of the motive which produces them. No longer living to themselves, they are observed and felt, by those who note them, to be both confessors and true witnesses of Him whose name they bear. Need it be added that such a life must from its very nature be one of conflict and of trial in this world? For we suffer with Christ, if in Spirit we are truly His. It is a life which nothing natural can nourish, and against which all that is not of the Father is in league. But its deep springs are in the living God, and its experimental habit is both joy and peace. Drawn by His own sure tokens to the love of Him whom they have not yet seen, His people hold their faith with confidence, and with a joy that is unspeakable and full of glory. In Him they have received already the salvation of their souls, and they wait only for His personal appearing to enter on the perfect fruition of their hope.³ Engrossed, meanwhile, and filled by the ever blessed Object of the Spirit's thoughts, the soul which feeds thus upon the bread of God, finds desire grow with its enjoyment of the grace on which it lives.

It remains also to be noticed, that not the least part of the value of the verse now before us is the practical safeguard which it offers to the true believer from the illusions, so fatal often in their last result, of spiritual transcendentalism. For its effect, when honestly received, is not only to assure our hearts in the enjoyment of the grace and love of our Redeemer, but to recall us also to *ourselves*, as namers of His name, and endued with titles of grace

³ 1 Peter i. 8, 9-13.

and honour which are naturally His alone. If, in the estimation of the Spirit, we are "elect of God, holy and beloved," there should be, and there will be, a responsive moving of our hearts to Him, who of His abundant mercy has begotten us again to our living hope.⁴ To accept by a mental assent only the doctrine of substitutional atonement, and to make gospel truth in the abstract a quietus for our conscience, while we live still to ourselves, is not to be a new creature in Christ Jesus. For God's new workmanship is totally unlike the old.⁵ It looks to its Creator as naturally as the former turns away from Him, through the perverting force of sin. It is from the *heart* that the obedience of faith is rendered by the former slaves of sin.⁶ "We joy in God," says the same voice in another place. "We rejoice in *Christ Jesus*; we worship God in the *Spirit*," &c. Such is the language of a faith which rests not in its doctrinal position, but in the living God of its salvation. We have, as Christians, to live a life here in the flesh, though, in the truth of our standing as children of God, "we are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if the Spirit of God dwell in us."⁷ Believers, let us well remember, though new creatures as the workmanship of Him who called them, are still men of like passions with their former selves. Their new nature is encompassed by the old, and in continued conflict with it.⁸ Their faith is their victory that overcomes the world,⁹ and by faith they may and ought to rise above themselves in pureness, in knowledge, and in habit of

⁴ 1 Peter i. 3.⁵ Eph. ii. 10.⁶ Rom. vi. 17.⁷ Rom. viii. 9.⁸ *Infra*, chap. v. 17.⁹ 1 John v. 4, 5.

life, according to the measure of the ever blessed hope which fills their hearts.¹ In the power of the same faith they *sink* also, as well as rise; accepting joyfully their own judicial level as contrite confessors of sin, in their grateful and sympathizing recognition of the sufferings of Christ. For their sakes He confessed Himself "a worm and no man," when He took upon Him the whole weight of our sin.² And should His followers and the bearers of His cross wish ever to rise higher in their own sight and their own names than the place of His humility for them?

Yet, alas! how easily does the native and evil elasticity of the flesh assert and re-assert itself; producing as its result that strangest and saddest of all moral phenomena, a proud and high-minded believer in Jesus Christ! We fall when we think we stand. Let us remember, watchfully, that whenever God's children are anything in their own eyes they rise above the truth and are again, while their delusion lasts, a wrongful lie against the Lord's peculiar glory.³ Their natural confidence becomes their Saviour's shame; their true and lasting honour is to glory in His *cross*.

Verse 21. "I do not frustrate the grace of God," &c. It may seem bold to say that this is, even among true Christians, an exceptional claim of praise. But it is so. Of three apostles—Peter, Barnabas, and Paul—two fell, as we have seen, under the opposite condemnation, and one only stood fast in the truth. And as it then was in the morning of the gospel, and in such illustrious instances, so has

¹ 1 John iii. 3.² Psalm xxii. 6.³ Psalm lxii. 9.

it continued, and will go on to the end, when true faith shall have perished and a form of godliness alone remain.⁴ For wherever nature has a voice it contradicts the cross of Christ, and rare is it for that voice to be at rest. Yet how simple and affecting is the truth denied! *Christ* (he well knew, and would have us also know, the weight and value of that Name) died gratuitously, the apostle says, if man has, or can acquire for himself, a righteousness apart from Him. For righteousness can be manifested only in two ways: by law or by the grace of God. By the first, man stands, if stand he can, upon the footing of his own obedience. He is righteous as a doer of the will of God. By the last, man takes another name from that which was his native heritage, and stands upon the merit of a righteousness which has proved and glorified itself apart from him, yet freely makes itself his own. Because Another is righteous, he is justified by faith in Him.

The absolute exclusion of personal claim, or effort of any kind, from the question of human justification is here put before us with resistless force. By a straight and uncompromising appeal to our consciences, we are called to pronounce judgment on an altogether strange and unexampled act of God—the giving of His own Son to a transgressor's death. Was then the shedding of Christ's sacred blood a costly but unmeaning waste? It *was*, Paul affirms, if righteousness can be an attribute of man on any other terms than those of a free and gracious imputation. "The law" may be here taken as a generic expression for personal sufficiency of any kind. To

⁴ 2 Tim. iii. 5; Psalm xii. 1.

stand, therefore, on one's Christian consistency, or even on one's faith, is as real a frustration of the grace of God as an attempt to seek justification by the law of Moses. Christ's death is superfluous on any other assumption than that of the entire helplessness and destitution, as well as guilt, by nature of God's fallen creature in His sight. In due time, when we were without strength, Christ died for the ungodly.⁵ We stand *by* faith, not *on* it. For faith lives only on its object, and keeps lasting hold of *Him*. We are frustrating practically the grace of God, as often as we suffer any thought or wish to work within us that withdraws our hearts or minds from Him who only is our life and hope.

⁵ Rom. v. 6.

CHAPTER III.

HAVING in the foregoing chapter delivered his personal narrative as a divinely called ambassador of Christ, for the dismissal of all doubts on their parts as to the true nature of his ministry, and of the place in God's vineyard which by grace had been allotted to him, he returns now to the Galatians, and to a consideration of their actual state. And this he does in such a manner as to oblige them, on a comparison of the effects of his earlier testimony among them with those which had resulted from the false teachings of their "troublers," to become their own judges in this controversy of the Lord.

Verse 1. "O foolish Galatians, who did bewitch you,"¹ &c. His speech is rough and unceremonious, such as charity is wont to use when seeking to pull out of the fire those who are unconscious of their danger. These much-loved children, whom in Christ Jesus he had begotten through the gospel, and nourished for a while on the sincere milk of the word, had been living latterly upon the flatteries of Satan, and under their influence were fast sinking

¹ The clause following in our version "that ye should not obey the truth," though a most appropriate expletive (were any such necessary) of the apostle's words, is not found in the MSS. of highest value. These reject also the "among you" at the close of the verse.

into what must prove, if they remained in it, a fatal sleep. He hastens, therefore, to shake them rudely from their slumbers, and to shame their delusions by the searching words of light and truth. And it cannot be denied that they had doubly earned the opprobrious title which he here confers upon them. They were senseless, in allowing themselves to be imposed on by a class of pretenders, whose call for their subjection to the law of Moses should have been its own immediate refutation in the eyes of those who were already under Christ. They were foolish, also, in that they did not become instinctively aware of their descent from heaven to earth under the false leading of these treacherous guides, who were drawing them, they should have felt, from the green pastures of Immanuel's land to wander in the wastes of Sinai. Who then did bewitch them that the Scriptures, which could make them wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus, should now, by their perversion and false application, be made to defraud them of their proper hope by turning them from grace to works? One answer only can be rightly given to this question. The wizard who then prevailed with his enchantments, is the same father of lies who practises not less successfully in our days.

And if an inspired messenger of God accosted the Galatian churches in such terms, because of their heedless entanglement in Jewish error, what manner of language, we may well ask, might we expect to hear were such an one now found upon this earth? Would "foolish" be a word strong enough to mark the Spirit's sense of modern legalistic ritualism? For,

let us remember, what is now done is done in the face of noon-day light. The epistle now before us, with the rest of God's admonitory words, lies open under the eyes of those who now are choosing flesh instead of spirit, and are spoiling faith of its true character and distinction as the "evidence of things unseen," by pretending to approach the living God through forms and observances, which appeal solely to the senses and the natural imagination, and which, having never had His sanction, are as an offering of strange fire in His eyes. But, as it is written, "Lo, certainly in vain made he it; the pen of the scribes is in vain."² Delusion, of a stronger kind than that which fell on the Galatians, seems fast settling on the minds of men who claim for themselves a traditional right of guidance in the Church of God. Apostolic energy may have rescued the former from their danger, and no doubt did so to a large extent, but what hope is there for those who, with their example set so vividly before them, evade indeed the *letter* of apostolic censure by not enjoining literal circumcision and a direct return to Moses, while they equally subvert men's souls by putting ritualistic tinsel and unhallowed human ordinances in the place of that "reasonable service" which they only can render who with a blood-purged conscience worship the Father in spirit and in truth?³ To this question I have no reply to give.

Returning now to our immediate subject, the verse before us, besides its weighty significance as a warning, is of incomparable value as a brief but perfect expression of what genuine gospel preaching, in

² Jer. viii. 8. ³ Heb. ix. 14; Rom. xii. 1.

the power of the Spirit, was then, and ever must be, in its object and effect. Its object is the setting forth of "Jesus Christ crucified," the person and the work of God's incarnate Son. Its effect is so vivid a portraiture of the mystery of divine love upon the fleshy tables of awakened hearts, that the eyes which God has opened do verily appear to see the ever-blessed truth declared. The power of producing this effect is not natural eloquence, though that too, as a means which God may use, has its office and effect. Apollos was a skilful speaker; Paul was not, but, as he tells us, rude of speech.⁴ But he spoke with a wisdom and power which were of creative efficacy; for his words were not his own. It was not with excellency of speech, but in the fulness and demonstration of the Spirit that he wrought as an evangelist. But the point of supreme interest to be noted is that the substance of his preaching was Christ *crucified*. Varying his style and mode of speech according to the known condition of his hearers, he could with equal readiness expose the folly of idolatry,⁵ detect and wither the false arts of Satan's emissaries,⁶ confound the circumcised opposers of the gospel of free grace,⁷ or bring trembling upon the soul of self-indulgent godlessness.⁸ But these were means only to an end, and that end was not the correction merely of vicious habits, or the raising of man's moral tone, or in any wise the restoration of his fallen honour as a child of the first Adam, but, by making manifest the redeeming love of God in Christ, to draw men altogether from themselves to *Him*.

⁴ Acts xviii. 24; 2 Cor. xi. 6. ⁵ Acts xvii. 23, *seq.* ⁶ Acts xiii. 9.

⁷ Acts xi. 22; xiii. 46, *seq.* ⁸ Acts xxiv. 26.

The declaration that Christ crucified was evidently set forth before the eyes of the Galatians, is another way of saying that the gospel of that glory which is hidden from the natural eye, had been commended to their hearts by the quickening power of the Holy Ghost.⁹ He is addressing them, in other words, as *God's elect*; for he has confidence in them through the Lord, though necessitated to rebuke them sharply for the healing of their weakened faith.¹ An uplifted Christ will eventually draw all unto Himself,² but until the time of general renewal come, the election see, the rest are blind. Like their Jewish brethren in the faith, in the same region, to whom Peter afterwards addressed his two epistles, these quondam worshippers of them which by nature are no gods, are in his eyes "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ."³ Thus, while utterly condemning their existing state, he holds them in the arms of an all-believing charity,⁴ and strengthens his hope in them by a remembrance of what they had been when he wrought among them at the first. For he had not forgotten with what zeal and fervent readiness of mind they then listened to his testimony, and embraced the glad tidings of God's saving grace. Like the messenger who spake to them, they also "saw that just One, and heard the words of His mouth,"⁵ as the Spirit revealed them to their hearts. The Son of God, whose voice is in the word

⁹ 2 Cor. iv. 3, 4.

² John xii. 32.

⁴ 1 Cor. xiii. 7.

¹ *Infra*, chap. v. 10; Titus i. 13.

³ Chap. iv. 8; 1 Peter i. 1, 2.

⁵ Acts xxii. 14; Eph. iv. 21.

of His own grace, had come and had given them an understanding to know Him that is true.⁶ Yet where now was this wisdom from above? Like the fathers, who are our warning example, they were become a foolish people and unwise, and for the same reason,⁷ but with a blame proportioned to the mightier mercy which they were so ill requiting in their present ways.

For indeed the very sickness of delusion was upon them.⁸ Like the people in the wilderness, who loathed in their evil lustings what miraculously lay about their tents, so these, with the true bread from heaven set before them, were seeking the false meat of bondage for their souls. It was the evil heart of unbelief that was thus drawing them away from light to darkness, and from the living to the dead. And their sin was, as it always is, their folly also and their shame. Did they consider from what it was that they were turning in pursuit of their new aim? Where was their spiritual *understanding*, that they should suffer any other object to engage their minds, after having once discerned the personal grace and glory of the Son of God? Where were their *hearts*, that the cross of His atoning agony and blood-shedding could fail to kill effectually all imaginations of self-righteousness, and make them for ever hateful to their souls? By His stripes they were healed, through His shame their faces were enlightened, and to His poverty they owed the wealth of their inheritance as sons of God. And were they now considering their Saviour or themselves? An enemy had no

⁶ 1 John v. 20; Eph. ii. 17.

⁷ Deut. xxxii. 6.

⁸ Isaiah i. 5; xlv. 20.

doubt deceived them, but the blame was theirs. Their bewitchment was a proof of the shallowness and feebleness of that first love which yet was genuine, and bore at the outset such fair and acceptable fruit.⁹ They had changed their own honour to dishonour; for they had turned their ears from God to man. They are shamed in their own nakedness instead of shining in the beauty of the Lord; and now His Spirit who once *led* them has to *strive*. The Lord will not forsake His chosen, but His word toward them is according to their ways.

Verse 2. "This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?"¹ By this home appeal to their spiritual consciousness he endeavours to excite in them a just appreciation of their folly. And truly these are memorable words, since they show us in the clearest manner how possible it is for men who have received the Holy Ghost, not only as the inward seal of their election, but, as the sequel clearly proves,² in an externally miraculous energy also, to be seduced from the simplicity of Christ by the witcheries of a self-flattering but heart-deceiving legalism. Well might the apostle marvel at their ready change from the giver of the Spirit to the minister of death. Before they ever heard of law, as a doctrine addressed to themselves, they had rejoiced

⁹ *Infra*, chap. iv. 14.

¹ To merely nominal professors such a question would have no application. But here, and always, the apostle ascribes to those who have once known and confessed the name of Jesus the attributes of genuine believers, until by a persistent opposition to sound doctrine they place themselves among the open adversaries of the faith.

² *Infra*, verse 5.

in a participation in the righteousness of God by faith in Jesus Christ; and the open seal of their acceptance in the beloved declared, not to themselves only, but to all who knew them, that they were the children of the living God. Could anything be added then to this completeness? Could the duty and habits of a slave adorn the doctrine which presented them to God as sons? Yet they had listened eagerly and unsuspectingly to men who, instead of ministering Christ to them, had told them only of themselves, and were beguiling them by lying promises of self-exaltation as obedient followers of Moses, and advancement in divine favour on their own account. They should have known and felt that such teaching was both a casting them down from their own true excellency, as complete in Christ, and an utter derogation of their Lord's peculiar glory. For that He only is personally worthy is the fundamental doctrine of the gospel.

Verse 3. "Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now being made perfect by the flesh?" To rid them effectually from the wiles of the deceiver, he first endeavours to restore them to themselves. Had they forgotten the beginning of their confidence, and that it was as anointed companions of the Son of God that they had begun to live as receivers of His own revealing Spirit?³ For it is witnessed by that Spirit, not only that Christ was delivered for our sins, but that He was raised again for our justification. But if this be so, what we *are*, by faith in Him, is as different from what we *were*, while in the flesh, as justification is from condemna-

³ Heb. iii. 14.

tion, and as life from death. With Him we are risen, and the flesh, with its real abominations and its false dreams of perfection, is hidden from the eye of faith in Christ's forsaken grave.

Let us mark well the force of this appeal. To *begin* in the Spirit is to date the commencement of our conscious life in Christ beyond the range and term of the old Adamic nature. The natural is first, the spiritual after, but in the estimate of truth they do not co-exist. The believer dies with Christ in the confession of His cross, ending there the days of his dishonour as a sinner, to begin his new and never-ending life of righteousness and blessing by faith in the risen and ascended Son of man. The Spirit is life because of righteousness. Sent forth by the Father in the name and as the witness of His glorified Son, He sheds abroad in the believing heart the blessed consciousness of an acceptance with the Father of which Christ alone is personally worthy. Forgiven and forgotten as a transgressor from the womb, and heir of wrath,⁴ he has come, by a new and divine birth, to a new and divine heritage of light and glory. But all this was, in the case of the Galatians, eclipsed and practically forgotten in their new and mad pursuit of legal righteousness. What thoughtful Christian fails to share the apostle's astonishment as he watched their course? Had they reached, indeed, so strange a pitch of senselessness as not to perceive that this seeking of their own was a virtual renouncing of the things of Christ? that they must cease to look upward, and turn again their eyes and minds towards the earth? that the path on which they were

⁴ Isaiah xlviii. 8; Eph. ii. 3.

desiring to enter had never yet led any mortal man to life, but multitudes through bondage into hopeless death? For what reasonable hope can law furnish to a soul that only dies because of sin? Yet they dreamed of adding something to their already overflowing portion, as believers in the Son of God, by becoming Moses' disciples. Christ was the beginning only, on this reckoning, and themselves the end; He the foundation, and their own glory the top-stone!

Folly was doubtless chargeable on *them*, but it is worth while to ask if we, who have the apostle's words before our eyes, are wiser in our day? Alas! what we are here contemplating is no rare and exceptional phenomenon of error, but rather the worn way of those multitudes who from age to age, with Christ's name upon their lips, are leaning secretly on something less than Christ, or seeking a factitious standard of so-called spiritual attainment, which is in reality no better than an ending in the flesh.⁵

Verse 4. "Did ye suffer so many things in vain?" &c. We have here a further attestation of the genuineness of the earlier faith of those whom he addresses, and a proportionate augmentation, consequently, of the burden of their present blame.

⁵ The difficulty of distinguishing the precious from the vile is perhaps greater now than at any previous time. Christian sentiment (true or false) is so widely diffused, and works of a more or less directly beneficial kind, all which remotely or immediately refer themselves to Christian principle, abound so largely in modern society, that no eye that is not habituated to the light of the sanctuary can discern often the living from the dead confessor of Christ's name. There are, however, signs of spiritual life, which hypocrisy indeed may simulate, but the absence of which must

By a pointed reference to their former participation of the afflictions of the gospel, he puts in the very strongest light the untoward character of their later change. If they had been blessed and empowered of God, in the name of His rejected but now glorified Son, they had for His sake also suffered at the hands of men. Had, then, these afflictions, they should ask themselves, been endured for something less than the whole truth, that they should be now seeking to add, at their own cost, to the comeliness which God had put upon them in His Son? In the abundant joy of their first love, they had borne with a glad and willing thankfulness the reproach of Christ. His glory was their shame, His shame their glory, before men. But if their much-prized legalism was a thing of real value, all this was both vain and wrong. The chief thing was not Christ, but law. Nay, law and grace are so opposed in principle, that to pursue the former they must abandon first the latter. Fools, however, as they were, when duped thus through the sleight of men by the deceiver and hater of their souls, he remembers that they once received the Spirit, and will not, therefore, entertain the thought that they will continue in their present state. And so he adds: "if it be yet in vain."

ever cast suspicion on a professed knowledge of God. Where the Spirit has the mastery of the heart, the love of Christ's person is the ruling passion of the soul, which finds both its food and its delighted exercise in a meditation of His love and in seeking out and following His will. *Truth* will to such an one be evermore the first consideration, for without it we *lose Christ*. The modern habit of postponing doctrinal soundness to what is falsely called charity is, if possible, a more dangerous form of betwitchment than that which brought the churches of Galatia into so evil and perilous a plight.

Verse 5. "He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth He it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?" The Supplier of the Spirit is the God of truth and righteousness, who sends forth the Comforter as the living seal and witness of His own new creation in Christ Jesus. Now it is evident, from the apostle's language here, that the Galatians had still among them visible tokens of God's active power as the worker of miracles. In whose *name*, then, he requires them to ask themselves, were these wonders wrought—in the name of Moses, or in that of Jesus Christ? Did ever any one by whom God had wrought thus wondrously among them refer His miraculous powers to the law? Is not the very question a self-contradiction? Law was before grace, but law made nothing perfect, and wrought no deliverance, or Christ would not have come with better things. But Christ being come, the Spirit, which of old bare witness against Israel as law-breakers and rebellious, is in and amongst the purged worshippers of the Father, as the revealer and glorifier of the name of Jesus. But plain as all this should have been to those who had received the word with understanding, the effect of subsequent false teaching had so unsettled the faith of the Galatian churches, that the apostle has now to found them, as it were, anew upon the Rock of their salvation. And this is the main object of what follows. Once more we should note carefully, before entering on his argument, the striking moral incongruity of their spiritual condition with the outward tokens of God's presence, which continued to attest these churches as His own. As

at Corinth,⁶ so in the assemblies of His true, though faulty, worshippers in Galatia, divine gifts and energies were in an efficacious and uninterrupted exercise, although the personal state of those among whom they were manifested was anything but right. Moreover, this operative energy of the Spirit proved at least the occasional activity of faith among them, notwithstanding their general declension. For the Lord cannot work mightily where no faith is.⁷ God upholds His people while faith lives at all among them, for the sake of Him whose name they bear; He rebukes and chastens them according to the manner of their work.

Verse 6. "Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted (or imputed) to him for righteousness." By leading their minds immediately to Abraham, he strikes at once the root of their spiritual disease. For it was by a false use of that divinely honoured name that their seducers had obtained a favourable hearing for their lie. By a simple reference therefore to the Jewish Scriptures he demonstrates the all-important fact that Abraham, whose children those self-deceived teachers of law, and preachers of circumcision claimed to be, was ignorant of both these things at the time when he was justified of God by faith. The force of the apostle's reasoning, which turns upon the single point of justification, is evident. Nothing can add to *righteousness*. It is the very glory of God Himself, as well as of man, as His created likeness. But the Galatians had believed on Jesus Christ for justification in His name; and God had borne them witness,

⁶ 1 Cor. i. 7; xii., xiv.

⁷ Mark vi. 5.

in that He had given them the Holy Ghost. Like little children, however, unaware of the true value of what they had received, they had turned an eager ear to those who, through circumcision and observance of the law of Moses, promised them promotion to the higher rank of Abraham's children. In their doing of their evil work these false apostles acted wisely. They could appeal to Scripture in proof of the supremacy of Israel among the nations of the earth. Making, therefore, the Gentile origin of the Galatians the basis of their sophistries, they tried but too successfully, by throwing them back from Christ upon *themselves*, to make them freshly conscious of their natural inferiority to the Jews, and desirous of rising from that baser level to the fellowship of a people whom the Lord had blessed and called His own.

This cozening artifice of the adversary was plausible and well suited, as he knew, to the impulsive sincerity of their natural character. *Truth* only had yet reached them in the name of Jesus Christ, and they had no predisposition to question doctrines which claimed the same authority as those of Paul, only with a yet higher sanction, as these ministers of Satan shamelessly affirmed, when commending on that very plea a different gospel to their souls. Yet their dupes were to be blamed, though not as Cephias was. For they should not only have remembered what they once had known respecting Paul himself, and the difference of law from gospel, as exemplified in him, but they should have better known also, and guarded more watchfully, the treasure which they had received from God through him. But instead

of watching, they were vainly confident, and so it had come to pass that, beguiled through their own heedlessness, they were drinking the poison of dragons⁸ instead of the sincere milk of the word of grace, and betaking themselves in spirit to the sepulchre of Moses, to sue there to the dead for a higher rank among the living; and with the natural result. Their commerce with the law had shaded, not to say destroyed, the former brightness of their peace. Instead of resting on the solid ground of righteousness, they looked for it where Moses drew its alluring but deceitful picture, in the law. Their moral condition was altogether changed. That which they had once received and gloried in as God's free gift, they were learning now to think of as a distant and uncertain hope. Paul's first care therefore is to re-establish their souls upon the firm footing of the faith from which they had been led away.

Verse 7. "Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham." As believers they possessed already, did they only know themselves and their true standing, the very honour which they vainly sought by works. Did they not believe in God, as receivers of that gospel which called them unto the grace of Christ? But if they did, they were "of faith," as Abraham was, and were therefore his children spiritually, as partakers and imitators of his faith. They were his "seed" also, in another sense, as he shows at the close of this chapter. But he reasons here, as he does when laying out before the saints at Rome the same great argument of justification by faith. Abraham's *sons* are they that do

⁸ Deut. xxxii. 33.

the *works* of Abraham; working, as he did, the work of God by *believing*, he on the Giver originally of promise, they on the same Promiser, as the fulfiller of His word in Christ.⁹

Verse 8. "And the Scripture, foreseeing," &c. The language of this verse is very striking, if only as an example of the place and authority held by the written word of God in an inspired mind. By a bold yet natural figure of speech, the Scripture is here (as often elsewhere also) invested with the attributes of Him whose word it is. But this is not a rhetorical figure merely. For the word of God is *living*, as well as powerful. To ascribe foresight to it, is but to assert with an especial emphasis its prophetic power. God's word is as Himself; for it is a record of the thoughts and purposes of One whose counsel is eternal. What then did the word foresee? That God would justify the heathen by faith. It preached beforehand, therefore, God's glad tidings to the nations, when it addressed itself to Abraham. The father only was the listener, but the entire generation of the righteous stood representatively before God in him.¹ In other words, the promise to Abraham was a gospel promise, given and received; and the words of God, which did not become *Scripture* until Moses wrote them, ages after, at

⁹ Rom. iv. 11 *seq.*; John viii. 39; vi. 29.

¹ Why is *Abraham* called in Scripture the father of the faithful rather than *Adam*, who was the first to hear the declared purpose of redemption? First, because to Abraham that purpose came in the form of a personal promise—"I will bless *thee*," &c.; just as the gospel now addresses individual souls: and secondly, because in the Abrahamic promise, the original word of mercy took its definite form: "*thy seed*." Thus Abraham saw the day of Christ.

His bidding, are here quoted in such form by the apostle as to give to this inspired writing an equal antiquity with the words and acts which it records. The Scripture then, he argues, preached free grace and blessing to the Gentiles, through Abraham, long before the giving of the law, when it said: "In thee shall all the Gentiles be blessed."² We may note here both the manner and the measure of this promise. First, it excludes all idea of justification, on God's part, by any other means than faith; and secondly, it reaches forth in its intent to His ulterior purpose when, in the final day of regeneration, the new earth shall be inhabited by the righteous only, and sin shall be a thing no longer known.³ In the meanwhile God justifies by His sovereign and electing grace; taking out of the Gentiles, by the effectual calling of His gospel, a people for His name. And whenever His gospel is received by faith, the blessing of Abraham comes, as it is written, upon the Gentiles through Jesus Christ.⁴

Verse 9. "So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham." As in verse 7 he claimed the paternity of Abraham for all believers, so here the *blessing*, which attends the birthright, is assumed for them also on the self-same ground. For God blesses only in the way of faith; His delight being evermore in those who stay their souls upon His word. But it is a *personal*, not a traditional,

² ἐνευλογηθήσονται ἐν σοὶ πάντα τὰ ἔθνη. These words are not an exact quotation of any single passage in the book of Genesis, but a condensation rather of many. The original promise in chap. xii. 3, bears the closest resemblance to the apostle's words.

³ 2 Peter iii. 13; Rev. xxi. 3, 4. ⁴ *Infra*, verse 14.

faith that obtains the blessing. The very strength of the natural Jew's assertion of superiority to the Gentile, was that Israel was the seed which God had blessed. The apostle here sets aside conclusively that delusive and unreal pre-eminence, by referring His blessing to its true and only cause. Flesh takes no blessing, and finds no entrance into the kingdom of God. He blesses whom He will, and on His own terms only. Faith hears and answers to those terms, and Abraham's gospel now becomes the gospel of believing Gentiles also. To all under heaven the glad tidings are now sent, and as many as be "of faith" are blessed with faithful Abraham. Not that this opening of the doors of saving mercy to the Gentiles destroys the natural standing and covenanted supremacy of Israel, as he elsewhere fully shows; but so long as the gospel is preached by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, the burden of which gospel is justification by faith in an unseen Saviour, there ceases to be any difference between the Gentile and the Jew. It is a part of the great mystery of godliness, that He who was manifest in the flesh, to be rejected by His natural kin, is now "preached among the Gentiles and believed on in the world."⁵ The question now is no longer one of hereditary privilege in the flesh, but of newness of life, and what belongs to it, by faith in Jesus Christ. To the father and the children alike the blessing comes upon the same conditions. Abraham was an idolator by birth, but received the sovereign word of God by faith. We Gentiles are morally in the same condition, and listen to God's gospel, like our

⁵ 1 Tim. iii. 16.

father in the faith, as to a voice direct from heaven. The Jew also, as he afterwards goes on to show, takes his blessing on exactly the same ground, being called from his vain conversation received by tradition from his fathers, to look by faith upon the Lamb of God and live. For when God is freely justifying men through *faith* there is no room for distinctions of any other kind. Abraham believed God, who blessed him through his faith. They also who now hear, in any tongue, the voice of the same God, and hearken as He preaches peace by Jesus Christ, are blessed, only in a fuller measure, with believing Abraham,

Verse 10. "For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse," &c. We have now the solemn but inevitable contrast to the foregoing statement. As faith brings blessing, so law brings cursing on its subjects. It impends over, nay, rests upon, all who seek their justification through their works. His language on this point is absolute and conclusive. Blessing was indeed conditionally promised by the lawgiver; but inasmuch as no sinner can possibly fulfil a condition of pure righteousness, the apostle takes here no notice of the voice from Mount Gerizim.⁶ He cites only the formula of general execration which ends the long list of specific curses, and from which exemption can be claimed solely by a continuing, on Israel's part, "in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." Such is the real position of all who voluntarily or involuntarily are descriptively "of the works of the law;" a phrase which embraces, we should carefully observe, all confessors of the name of the true and only God who are not distinctively

⁶ Deut. xi. 13, *seq.*

“of faith.” For if Gentiles confess Israel’s God, they are either under the curse of Moses, or the blessing of Jesus Christ. He does not pause in his argument, in order to discover to us experimenally, as in Romans vii., the impossibility of justification by works, but simply demonstrates the certainty of blessing and cursing, as these things result of necessity from the opposite principles of grace and law. But lest any one should peradventure object that the denunciation of a prospective and conditional curse might be nullified by actual obedience on our parts, a further witness to the contrary is forthcoming from the same divine source.

Verse 11. “But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith.” What God writes man verifies, though often unconsciously and against his will. The present quotation is taken from a prophet who, though no lawgiver like Moses, bewailed in his day, as all his brethren did in theirs, the utter desecration of the law, and turned for salvation to his holy One, whose word of gracious promise should not always tarry.⁷ Let us observe first the force of the words, “*in the sight of God.*” Law was a justifier of man with man, as Paul himself is witness. To be a strait and consistent Pharisee was “gain” to one who reckoned after the flesh. But the law, when its true force is known, is *spiritual*, and in its nature contrary to what is carnal. His long-cherished and fairly boasted legal righteousness becomes, therefore, unrighteousness when examined in the light of God.⁸ Observe also the peculiar force of his reasoning. A general

⁷ Habak. i. 3, 4; ii. 1-4.

⁸ Rom. vii.; Phil. iii.

affirmative is stated: "The just shall live by faith."⁹ But if so, none lives by any other means, because by that means only are men justified; and sinners cannot live to God, but are spiritually dead always in His sight. Thus a brief sentence of Scripture, which in the days of his spiritual blindness he had read with very different eyes, becomes, in the hands of this inspired scribe of God, an efficient basis for his absolute conclusion that none can be justified in the sight of God by law. "It is *evident*," he says: not indeed to the natural man, but to the spiritual; to all who know, through grace, the truth and power of the words of God.

Nor let us fail to give the word "justified" its proper meaning. The "just" or "righteous," in the language of the Spirit, are not only the "forgiven." There are expressed in the single term "justification," as used in Scripture with reference to God's redeemed, three distinct, though inseparable, ideas. It means first, the sinner's pardon, or the remission of his sins; secondly, deliverance (as involved in the former) both from the fear of punishment and the shameful sense of guilt in the sight of God; and thirdly, the positive imputation of righteousness. What the sinner is on his own account, as well as through hereditary taint, is no more remembered before God, who justifies the penitent believer according to the worthiness of Him whose name he pleads, and now regards and

⁹ ὁ δίκαιος ἐκ πίστεως ζήσεται: "He who is just in the way of faith shall live." Thrice is this quotation made by Paul; twice (here and in Rom. i. 17) to enforce the fundamental doctrine of justification by faith, and once (Heb. x. 38) in a hortative application, as a warning against retrogressive tendencies on the part of those who already had believed through grace.

accepts him in His own beloved Son. The righteousness of the just is "of the Lord," who personally *is* their righteousness and peace. *In Him* they have both these inseparable things.¹ He is their life, and the light of their unending day. And by the faith of Him they live on through the time of pilgrimage in an assured hope of being "found in Him" in the day when they are revealed together in His likeness, and presented *personally*, as they now are representatively, without spot to God.²

Verse 12. "Now the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them." What he affirms of the law is thus conclusively attested by the law. Doing right is one species of perfection; being set right is another. The former was the vain proposal of the law; the latter is the blessed reality of the gospel, when received into the heart by faith. In this verse the apostle concludes the negative side of his argument. He has demonstrated, by the aid of Jewish Scripture, both the contrariety of law to faith, and the intrinsic and decisive superiority of the latter. *Life* is their common prize, which in the contest faith alone is found to win. The law works wrath, and is a ministry of death; but faith, opening eagerly its ear to God as the preacher and bestower of His own righteousness in Christ, finds life eternal in His words. For His words are a recital also of His *acts*. The law, which bade men work, is silenced by its own fulfilment in the Lord. What it could not do for man, because of its weakness through the flesh, has been done by Him who gave it by His servant Moses, and has both magnified it and re-

¹ Isaiah xlv. 24.

² Phil. iii. 9.

moved it from His people's conscience through the obedience of His Son. What none could do for his brother or himself, that he should give to God a ransom for his soul,³ his judge has wrought out for him in the strange abundance of His gracious love. And the gospel, which the Galatians in their folly were so nearly letting slip, is the glad announcement of these things; the preparation, therefore, for the true believer's entrance into and enjoyment of the endless rest of God.

The law, then, is not of faith, and blessing cannot, therefore, come by law. But the law was of God, and its curse was denounced at His command. If, then, the blessing of the Abrahamic promise is to rest securely in its objects, the interruptive covenant of works must first be righteously annulled. How this is done, and the positive and necessary outflowing of divine blessing through its appointed and ever blessed channel of mediatorial grace, are next asserted with the same closeness of logical reasoning in what follows.

Verse 13. "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us: for it is written," &c. The full import of the reproachful question addressed to the Galatians in the first verse of this chapter is made yet more apparent by these words. For the crucifixion of the Son of God, which, as the divinely ordained act of expiation, forms the main burden of God's gospel, was of necessity also the believer's deliverance from the burden of legal responsibility. The law which, as he elsewhere says, was made for sinners,⁴ is powerless beyond its curse.

³ Psalm xlix. 7, 8.

⁴ 1 Tim. i. 9.

We have already seen in what manner the apostle treats the subject of the law's removal by a righteous fulfilment in the person of Him who gave Himself for our sins.⁵ In the verse before us and the one immediately following, we have a more limited view of the doctrine of redemption and its fruits, which we are now to regard in their special relation to the penal and vindictive character of law. God had justified Abraham by faith, and the Scripture preached before to him the gospel of Gentile promise. But the law had in the meantime been given, and its entrance not only intercepted the fulfilment of the promised blessing, by putting its more immediate objects under the bond of a personal obligation which must be discharged ere the original promise could take effect on *them*, but by its very nature it turned, as we have seen, the blessing to a curse, because of the natural inability of fallen and sinful man to keep a law which called for justice, holiness, and truth. From being conditionally *for* us, therefore, in its terms the law became positively and relentlessly *against* us in effect. I speak thus generally because the apostle's reasoning respects the Gentile, not less than the Jewish objects of the promise, though in a remoter sense, seeing that salvation is of the Jews, and it was by Abraham's seed that the promise was to come. Until the removal, therefore, of the yoke of bondage, by a just exaction of the penalty of violated law, no lasting benefit could come to any one by promise. The curse devoured Jacob because of his iniquities, while the Gentiles were abandoned to their own perverted way.

⁵ *Ante*, page 92, *seq.*

The curse of the law upon its own transgressors was a consequence of the same sin which had called down originally the Creator's curse upon the ground from whence man had been taken, and on which he walks. The removal, therefore, of the one is the removal also eventually of the other. But there is a most important difference in the manner and time in which the blessings of redemption are dispensed. Already the curse departs from the soul of the believer who in Christ has a present redemption, even the remission of his sins, and is blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Him. But his body groans on still, with the rest of the old creation, under the burden and effect of sin, and though made free indeed by the Son of God, he has no present remission of the sentence which condemned our first father and his offspring to a life of toil, as the price of his subsistence here below. *Faith* only tastes the blessing now, while the whole creation groans in hope for the day of its complete redemption.⁶ For it is God's good pleasure to reconcile all things to Himself—things heavenly or earthly—by the cross of His own Son.⁷ Our immediate concern, however, is with the wondrous and deeply-affecting declaration that Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by being Himself made a curse for us.⁸

And here it is necessary, above all, to guard against false inferences from this truly solemn statement. The law curses *sinner*s. Christ became "a curse." Was He, then, *in any sense* "a sinner"? Strenuous

⁶ Rom. viii. 19–23.

⁷ Col. i. 20.

⁸ γενόμενος ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν κατάρα. See further on this subject *Notes on 1 Cor. xii. 3.*

asserters of the doctrine of justification by faith have insisted that He *was*.⁹ But I oppose to this an absolute denial. He became a curse, the apostle says, by being hanged upon a tree. Such was his judicial position as the bearer of our sins. But it is of the very essence of sacrificial or substitutional atonement that the substituted victim should not only be personally without blame, but that the sins and penalties imposed on it should be still called by the names of those who committed and incurred them. *Substitution* is not *identification*. A sin-offering is identified, not with the sinner, but the *sin*. Israel's sins were laid upon the sin-offering, which became thereon, *for their sakes*, a devoted thing. *Our* sins were laid on Jesus, who became, in like manner, as a thing devoted for our sakes. "*His own self* bare *our* sins in His own body on the tree;"¹ suffering thus, by a sacrificial imputation as a sin-bearer, in the truth of His own blessed Person as the spotless Lamb of God. It is *He* whom the Father only knew, and whom He did not spare, whom God made sin for us. What we are by evil merit, He became by imputation through His self-devoting grace. Things that He knew not were laid to His account, and, as His people's sacrificial representative or substitute, He treats them as His own. The sin which is in the world was charged upon His head. The curse of a broken and dishonoured law became His who, though alone worthy of its blessing, for transgressors' sakes was numbered with transgressors. If made a curse, it was *for us*. The Redeemer is the believing sinner's

⁹ Notably so Luther, in his Commentary on this Epistle.

¹ 1 Peter ii. 24.

substitute, and, therefore, cannot be in either state or character, the person whom He represents. The *Just* died for the *unjust* when Christ suffered in the flesh for us.² But because He bore His people's sin, He could and did become judicially the thing which He assumes. To return once more to the outward form and manner of this mystery.

Crucifixion, as the reader is most probably aware, was not a Jewish, but a Gentile mode of punishment; but hanging on a tree was practised by the Jews on the bodies of those whom they judged worthy, not of death only, but of especial infamy as well. With a prophetic reference to the death of deaths which Christ must undergo, not only as the fore-ordained and acceptable Lamb of God, but also as the despised and rejected of men, Moses declared the person who should be thus treated to be "the curse of God."³ Surely, the solemn and marvellous force of this is evident. Without sin no curse could have existed; the curse causeless cannot come. But it cleaves, as its very shadow, to iniquity. Now, the blessed God who cursed in His holiness the first sinner and original tempter of mankind, without hope of revocation, and for his victim's sake cursed also the ground on which he walked, had provided in His eternal purpose, not a curse, but a blessing for the predestined heirs of grace. But sin had meanwhile been demonstrated, by the law, in its exceeding sinfulness. Transgression provoked wrath, and the law's curse was the voice of inexorable justice, which blood only could appease. Sins must be *penally* visited, as well as sacrificially annulled, and righteousness must be es-

² 1 Peter iii. 18; iv. 1.

³ Deut. xxi. 23, margin.

tablished in its place, before the curse could be supplanted by the blessing. And both these things were accomplished by the cross, when God "made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."⁴ Made sin sacrificially for us, as the offered Lamb, He becomes also, in the *manner* of His sacrifice, "the curse of God." For the law curses every description of iniquity, and all that can be comprehended in the one word "sin" was, by the grace of God to usward, laid judicially upon His ever-blessed Son.

Two things have here to be considered: the completeness of the work of deliverance, and the grace unspeakable of the Deliverer. The former of these is but a light tax on our faith, if only we entertain a just conception of the latter, which, plain and decisive as the record of it is, lies utterly beyond the reach of natural thought, and becomes the heart's treasure of the child of God only through the revealing power of the Holy Ghost. Every quickened soul is made to execrate itself on account of its own sins, but remorse turns to contrition and a half-incredulous amazement in the presence of the cross. For there essential Righteousness is seen to be made sin, and the Seed and Heir of blessing made a curse *for us*. Such is the true reason and assured reality of that love which is of God, and which the Holy Ghost, as the revealer of Christ crucified, sheds abroad in the hearts of His elect. Sin is indeed an accursed thing, and a true sense of it is to the convicted soul a shame and sorrow insupportable. But

⁴ 2 Cor. v. 21. For a further exposition of this passage, see *Notes on 2 Corinthians, in loc.*

it is not the pleasure of the Judge of sin that the guilty who acknowledge their transgression and discern their sin⁵ should bear its burden still. With confession it departs from us to Christ; not to abide there, but to cease for ever through the precious virtue of His blood-shedding.

The true Sacrifice has been offered and accepted, with no need or possibility of repetition, for perfection cannot repeat or go beyond itself; and the worshipper thus purged has no more conscience of sins. He has, instead of this, the answer of a good conscience toward God, because purged by the blood of Him who by the same precious blood is gone, as the Forerunner of His people, into heaven itself, there to appear in the presence of God for us.⁶ We think, therefore, of Him now, not as bearing, but as having borne, our sins. Instead of our sins, for the sake of which the Father's countenance was hidden from the dying Sufferer, He bears now upon His shoulders and His bosom, as the great High Priest of our profession, the accepted names of His redeemed, on which the eyes of Divine glory rest in lasting complacency and peace. For we are come, if believers, to Jesus, the Mediator of the New Testament, and to the blood of sprinkling, which speaks better things than Abel. Sin has changed places in the will and mind of God. What was both in and on us, by our birth and works, was laid entirely, and once for all, on Him; and by our faith we make this blessed truth our own. By His bruise we are healed.⁷ The sort of feeling which should arise on our parts, while meditating such a verse as this, it is unnecessary to

⁵ Psalm li. 2. ⁶ Heb. ix. x. ⁷ Isaiah liii. 5, margin.

point out. The heart which hears the Spirit's voice will need no other prompting of its love. Meanwhile, let ambitious longings, and disputatious wranglings, and careless elation of spirit—things found too often, with others of like kind, among true namers of the name of Christ, yet all of them belonging to the sin which God has cursed—be shamed to stillness by the recollection on our parts that, to raise us to the level of our present confidence, the Christ in whom is all our hope was *crucified*; and that, if we are blessed at all, it is because He who alone is worthy of a blessing was *made a curse for us*. And this was done, he proceeds to tell us,

(Verse 14), "That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through (or in) Jesus Christ;⁸ that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." We have here stated the effect on the Gentile and Jewish believer respectively of the judicial execution of the law. By means of the death of Christ, the prophetic gospel preached to Abraham becomes, to its predestined objects, a present ministry of grace. The Son of God, uplifted as a spectacle of ignominy between earth and heaven, is become, by His resurrection from the dead, the open source of life and blessing to the nations of the world. The gospel of God is addressed to every creature under heaven, for the gathering from among the nations of a people for the name of Jesus Christ. By the same means also, the long-promised gift of the Spirit is fulfilled to those of the natural heirs of the Abrahamic promise who by grace receive the saving word

⁸ *ἐν* I.X. The blessing comes on those who by faith receive Him whose it naturally is. (*Conf.* John i. 12.)

of God. Gentiles are by natural description strangers from the covenants of promise,⁹ though prophetically contemplated in them, as we have already seen. Israel, the native heir, yet misses for the present the inheritance, because he seeks it not by faith, but, as it were, by the works of the law.¹ And thus the Lord's own words in John xii. 32, whose full realization awaits "the world to come" of which the Spirit speaks,² receive already their primitival accomplishment in the founding and edifying of His own elect Church.³

Verse 15. "Brethren, I speak after the manner of men," &c. We have here a marked change in the apostle's style. He had hitherto delivered himself as God's witness with oracular authority, supporting, however, each statement of his own by a direct appeal to the earlier testimonies of the Spirit; and tracing the course of the original promise to its fulfilment in the ministration of the Spirit, through faith, to the Gentile and the Jew, alike. Having thus vindicated the truth of God in the highest tone, he is led now to expatiate, for their and our sakes, on the same topic in a lower key; commencing here a new course of argument, in close yet familiar terms, for the purpose of anticipating objections, resolving pardonable doubts, and, by a fresh and full demonstration of the grace and glory of the gospel, effacing, if God blessed his words, the mischievous effects of the false legal teaching to which the Galatian churches had so unwarily inclined their ear. And in this strain he continues to the close of

⁹ Eph. ii. 12.

¹ Rom. ix. 31, 32.

² Heb. ii. 5, *seq.*

³ James i. 18.

the following chapter. Appealing first to their instinctive sense of the fitness of things, he reviews the history of God's covenant of promise through the medium of ordinary human analogy. Even a *man's* disposition of his own is held sacred and inviolable when once it is confirmed. No one either disallows it, or thinks of adding new stipulations to it. Completeness is of its very essence. It is a positive and final bond, from which release can come only through performance. Its *value* must depend of course on the ability of the contracting party to redeem his pledge. If then sinful men are found usually to respect their own engagements, how much more shall He do so who is righteous, and with whom is no variableness nor shadow of turning? Let it then be remembered that, come in the meanwhile what may, a blessing, and not a curse, is stored for Jew and Gentile equally in the original covenant of God.

Verse 16. "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ." The tenor and distinctive object of this indissoluble bond of blessing are here stated. The covenant of which he speaks was one of free and absolute promise, and it had a double object. Made with Abraham in the first place, it finds its true and final aim in Christ, the predestined seed of Abraham. The child to be one day born, must be the life and redemption of His father after the flesh, and Abraham's blessing meanwhile was in having such a seed. Himself the appointed channel through whom the promises of God in righteous fulfilment

reach their proper end, he grasps the blessing, ere it takes a visible form, by the faith with which he took hold of the words of God. "The promises" are here expressed in wide and general terms, all others being included of necessity in the comprehensive declaration, "*I will bless thee.*" For when God commits Himself thus absolutely to His creatures, all that He is, in His omnipotent grace and goodness, becomes the assured portion of the man who takes Him at His word. God's heir inherits all things; for the Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into His hand.⁴ Particular promises, therefore, whether relating to earth or heaven, are but instalments of that boundless debt of goodness which the love of God to usward who believe has thus freely taken on itself. But, as already noticed, the blessings of the righteous God, though intended mediately for the guilty, when their guilt should have been purged away, must have a direct and positive object to which it can immediately and righteously belong; otherwise truth ceases, and if grace reigns it reigns through unrighteousness. The latter part of this verse is intended to bring out distinctly this all-important principle.

Like many other of the Spirit's sayings, these words, when read with an eye unenlightened by the light of God, seem forced and arbitrary in the meaning here assigned to them by the apostle. For "seed" is, as a collective noun, used constantly in the Scriptures in the singular number to express a multitude. Why then does He say, with reference to this quotation, "He saith *not* unto *seeds*, as of

⁴ Rev. xxi. 7; John iii. 35.

many?" Does He *ever* say so? it might be fairly asked, and the reply must be, as to the form of language which He uses, *never*. Yet there is a reason of the soundest kind for the apostle's paradox. God, who speaks by His servant's pen to us, has chosen His words from the beginning with a wisdom and prudence worthy of His works. To the serpent He had said, "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; *it* shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise *his* heel."⁵ The wicked, viewed in their wickedness are, in the eyes of their Judge, a generation of vipers and children of the devil; God's elect, on the other hand, regarded by the eye of divine compassion and long-suffering, are "man born of woman," the woman's seed. For Eve, we must remember, received her name as the mother not of the dead but of the living.⁶ Cain was "of that wicked one." Of Seth his mother said, "God hath appointed *me* another *seed* instead of Abel, whom Cain slew."⁷ "Seed" therefore means generally "offspring;" whether one or many. But of the woman's seed *One* was distinctively to bruise the serpent's head, and to be bruised of him. Far down the line of natural generation there was to be found a child of woman, who should match himself antagonistically, not with the seed of the serpent, but with the serpent himself, and by destroying him, should become the Captain of salvation to the woman's seed at large, whom He is not ashamed to acknowledge also as His brethren.⁸

⁵ Gen. iii. 15.⁶ Gen. iii. 20.⁷ Gen. iv. 25.⁸ Heb. ii. 11. In a double sense the sanctifier and the sanctified are all "of one," all being of woman and all being also of God.

In like manner, when God spake to Abraham, He used the self-same word, for the double purpose of not only declaring the multitudinous abundance of the predestined heirs of promise, when He made the stars of heaven and the sand of the sea-shore the witnessing emblems of His purpose to fill both earth and heaven with the fruit of His own righteousness, but of indicating also the specific means and power of the blessing which He then pronounced. It is "in Christ" that all the promises of God are *yea*.⁹ It is in Christ also that the children of the promise live and are accepted before God. God's words, therefore, upon which His children feed, mean *Christ* in all they say; and Christ means grace and blessing, without any limit, to all who bow the knee of faith to Him.

Verse 17. "And this I say, that the covenant which was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul," &c. Remembering his comparison in verse 15, we have now its application to the Abrahamic covenant. The law was itself, indeed, a very real covenant, and having once been accepted could only be dissolved by a righteous and exact fulfilment; but what God had already spoken and confirmed to Christ¹ as its object cannot be invalidated,

When the Son of God took part, for the children's sakes, of flesh and blood, He did not despise the relationship thus formed by His own self-humbling grace. But until death was passed the sanctifier stood alone in His holiness, and the lover of His kind was straitened in His joy. It is when returned from the grave in which He left their sins that He shows His chosen plainly of the Father, as both His and theirs. (John xx. 17.)

⁹ 2 Cor. i. 20.

¹ S.V.A. omit the words *εἰς Χριστόν*; but if not expressed originally they are of necessity implied.

though its operation may for a season be postponed, by a later and incongruous covenant of works. Let then, he argues, this simple and necessary principle be recognized; or, in other words, let God only be honoured in the truth of His character, and the impossibility of personal justification, and consequently of the attainment of the promised blessing by the works of the law, must be at once apparent. For God's promises are, as he has already shown, addressed to *faith*, and "the law is not of faith."² But it has ever been the way of God to keep faith waiting for its hope. He dealt thus with Abraham and the fathers, sustaining their faith by frequent repetitions of His words, even after He had once for all confirmed His promise by an oath. Nor did He offer to the acceptance of their children the covenant of works, until, in fulfilment of His earlier engagement, He had delivered His people from the house of bondage, and brought them on eagles' wings unto Himself.³ Four hundred and thirty years later than His original words to Abraham,⁴ and immediately after this great proof of His fidelity to him whom He had called and blessed, Jehovah set before the Israelites the fatal test of their fitness to receive in their natural state the inheritance of promise. Had they known themselves or God, they never would have closed with the offer which Moses was commanded then to lay before them. But they did so eagerly; to their own hurt truly, but not to

² *Ante*, verse 14.

³ Ex. xix. 4.

⁴ This period appears to date from the last repetition of the Abrahamic promise to Jacob, on the eve of his descent into Egypt.

the undoing of God's former words. Nor even had they kept the law could the original promises be so attained, as he proceeds to show.

Verse 18. "For if the inheritance be of law, it is no more of promise; but God gave it to Abraham by promise." He does not notice here the natural impossibility of legal righteousness, but insists on the incongruity of such a means of justification and consequent attainment of the blessing, with the positive terms of God's anterior covenant. For a covenant confirmed must stand, and may not be annulled.⁵ Law is not promise, but *condition*, with results which cannot reach beyond itself. But God *gave*,⁶ he affirms, the inheritance when He promised it. Faith *has* what it believes; because it rests upon the word of Him who is almighty and who cannot lie. The notion, therefore, of our gaining anything from God by way of law, is excluded by the very terms of law. For all that God had to bestow, in the nature of a *blessing*, He had already given to the seed of Abraham. Still the law was given by the Promiser, and its existence and the fact of its imposition on the natural heirs of promise remain yet to be accounted for.

Verse 19. "Why then the law?" &c. The question is a perfectly fair one, and receives from the apostle an explicit and complete reply. First, it was *added*; not indeed as an after-thought, nor in anywise as a completion of that which was already perfect and confirmed, but as a new and particular injunction proposed by the Promiser, according to the counsel of His wisdom, for a purpose not yet

⁵ *Ante*, verse 15.

⁶ *κεχάρισται* "has freely given."

manifested, and which they took voluntarily upon themselves. Intrinsically apart from and opposed in its terms to the covenant of promise, it was introduced, at its appointed season, as a means of discovering to Israel their true personal condition in the sight of Him who had chosen them as the seed of Abraham His friend. That grace might be duly appreciated, law must first do its own preparatory work. "Because of *transgressions*," it was added, not to *prevent* these but *produce* them. Sin reigned from Adam to Moses, and transgression, which was sin's first form, must show itself in a multiplied intensity, and reach its acme in the utter breach of both the first and second great commandments of the law, when Israel hated, instead of loving, both God and their neighbour in the person of their own expected Christ. Transgressions, thus detected and defined, must continue till the Seed should come to whom the promises were made; and who at His appearing should "finish the transgression and make an end of sins,"⁷ for the true children of the covenant. Shadows flee before the morning, and the law though firmer, as an ordinance of God, than the heaven and earth which are its witnesses,⁸ ceases by fulfilment at the advent of the true Shepherd of the sheep.

To elucidate more thoroughly the meaning of this verse, let us remember that, according to the same witness, "By the law is the knowledge of sin."⁹ Now God's promises are, in their intention, not for sin but for righteousness. The law, therefore, instead of being an open highway to the promise, was an

⁷ Dan. ix. 24.

⁸ Luke xvi. 17; Isa. i. 2; xlii. 21.

⁹ Rom. iii. 20.

impassable obstruction to the blessing, until it was fulfilled in righteousness by one of that family on which it was imposed. As Egyptian bondage, with its sore and apparently irremediable affliction, was the preparation for the great diverance which Jehovah wrought by Moses, so the heavier bondage of the law was intended to bring down the heart of Israel, until their cry should again enter into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth, and bring the true Deliverer to their help. As an imposed ordinance of God, it was, therefore, in its nature temporary; while in its essence it was, as we have already been reminded, "spiritual," and consequently everlasting, finding its formal end, and living continuance in Him who is the eternal Refuge of His people.

Such was the intention of the giving of law; and in the form of its inauguration it stood equally in contrast to the earlier and lasting bond. God spake to Abraham immediately; the Creator noticing and blessing, in His sovereign good pleasure, the man whom He had called. But the law of works "was ordained by angels in the hands of a mediator." They received the law, as Stephen says, "by the disposition of angels."¹ Originating from the Holy One of Israel, it hides instead of manifesting the true brightness of His glory. God negociates a treaty of conditions through His flaming ministers; His *promises* go straight from His own mouth to the ear of faith, and bind the hearts of His elect to Him. Where personal obedience was in question, His angels who hearken to His voice are the witnessing deliverers of His behests; the instrumental ministry being suited

¹ Acts vii. 53.

to the inferior and transitory character of "the letter" as contrasted with "the Spirit."² God binds by His servants; He looses only by His Son. Nor could the people receive in their own persons a law which, though it was for life in its fulfilment, could be found only unto death by those on whom it was imposed.³ A mediator must appear; for them to God and from God to them. Mutual distance is the necessity of an unperformed covenant of works. For two parties are in question, whose agreement is a thing yet to be proved. And how slight the prospect of agreement was upon such terms was indicated not only by the terrific circumstances which accompanied the inauguration of the legal covenant, but by the state and feeling of the mediator Himself. For even Moses said: "I exceedingly fear and quake."⁴ To convince self-confident sinners of the holiness of Him with whom we have to do, was the object of this mediate revelation. As a Lawgiver, Jehovah must hold back from view the bright face of His throne. Dark clouds and destructive fire were the appropriate drapery of such a scene. But God's manner to usward, as the revealer of His own eternal thoughts of peace, is after an altogether different sort.

Verse 20. "Now a mediator is not of one, but God is one." Justice exposes what a righteous and true love would hide, but which it may hide only with the consenting help of law. God is in His nature *love*; but He is also the just God. Justice is His public and necessary attribute, the measure and witness of His every act. To do iniquity in any sense

² 2 Cor. iii. 11.³ Rom. vii. 10.⁴ Heb. xii. 21.

would be a dethroning of Himself.⁵ In fulfilling, therefore, His eternal purpose towards men, He proves His justice ere He gratifies Himself in the indulgence of His love. He is a just God and a Saviour.⁶ Remembering this, the explanation of the verse before us is not difficult. Law, the apostle tells us, was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator. But, he proceeds, "a mediator is not of one, but God is one." Here, then, is a pointed contrast: conditional agreement needs a mediator, but the promiser gives all its value to His promise by declaring it Himself. Now promise is essentially one-sided, or "of one;" and like the things of nature to which God is likened figuratively in the Spirit's testimony, when described as the rest and comfort of His people's faith, He needs no third party as a medium by which to communicate Himself to those whom He is pleased to bless. The "sun" shines on us through no other medium than the air we breathe, or he fails to cheer us by his beams. A "shield" protects us without any intermediate defence, and "a fountain of living water" is ready, without artificial aid, to give refreshment to our thirsty lips. And so of all the rest.

"A mediator is not of one, but God is one." What the Father promises the Son fulfils, and the Holy Ghost effectively reveals and imparts to the receivers of the truth. The New Covenant, of which Jesus is the mediator, is but the recovery and fulfilment of the ancient promise; and as God spake immediately to Abraham, so mediation, in the form and very truth of humanity, is not the sundering but the bringing together, in the person of the Son of God,

⁵ Psalm lxxxix. 14.

⁶ Isaiah xlv. 21.

of the parties whom the former mediator kept apart. God was and is *in Christ*. The man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all,⁷ was God, or He had not Himself to give; for no mere creature, of whatever elevation in the scale of being he may be, is or can be at his own disposal. The gospel preached before to Abraham was, though in an undeveloped form, "the glorious gospel of the blessed God,"⁸ which means, the worthy revelation of *Himself*. Law makes *man* evident, in all his helpless guiltiness, for which a curse only is a fit reward. The gospel sets forth on behalf of man, and in the person of the last and true Adam,—the very image and glory of God,—the wisdom, and power, and everlasting righteousness of that blessed and only Potentate, whose peculiar glory it is to save those who, in the pursuit of their own way, had destroyed themselves.⁹

That "God is one" was the cardinal truth of a genuine Israelite's confession; but its full meaning could be known only through another and far richer dispensation than that of Moses. "To us," says the apostle, "there is one God *the Father*,"¹ &c. The church now enjoys, in anticipation of the ulterior purposes of God, the fulness of all spiritual blessing, as accepted and already glorified in her exalted head. Israel who, with the vail still on his heart, now "doth not know," will know hereafter when, with unveiled and regenerated heart, the nation, wondrous from the beginning, shall sing forth their joyful confession, "God is the Lord, who hath shewed us light."² His fountain shall then be in a land of corn and wine.

⁷ 1 Tim. ii. 5, 6.⁸ 1 Tim. i. 11.⁹ Hosea xiii. 9.¹ *Notes on First Corinthians*, viii. 6.² Psalm cxviii. 27.

God, even their own God, shall bless them, and the nations of the earth shall both fear Him and acknowledge them.³ But the complete and eternal realization of this truth belongs to the post-millennial creation, when the Son shall have delivered up the kingdom to the Father, and God shall be all in all.⁴ The tabernacle of God will then be among men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and shall be their God.⁵ Communion of the faithful Creator with the work of His good pleasure will then be complete and everlasting. Then too, and then only, will the original promise, which filled the gospel which the Scripture preached to Abraham, receive its final honour in a perfect and absolute fulfilment.

Verse 21. "Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law." The emphatic demonstration already made of the essential distinction between the original and the later covenants, as well as their contradiction in terms, and the thorough disallowing of the latter as a means of righteousness or blessing, gives opportunity to natural reason to infer that God's law, as ministered by Moses, has something in its nature absolutely hostile to His promises. But this would be tantamount to a supposition that the all-wise God is in *name* only of one mind and unchanging in His purposes, but in reality divided against Himself. It is accordingly

³ Psalm lxxvii.

⁴ 1 Cor. xv. 28.

⁵ Rev. xxi. 3.

rejected as soon as stated, in the apostle's usual formula of abhorrent repudiation. So far from there being any intrinsic contrariety in their eventual intention, life, he argues, was the common end of both; and righteousness, without which none can live before his Maker and his Judge, was proposed by Moses, as well as assumed fundamentally in the Abrahamic covenant, which regarded as its true Object, not Abraham, but Abraham's Seed.⁶ The force of the apostle's reasoning is this: life always implies righteousness as its condition. In the case of Abraham, his faith in the promises was his *justification*, and the blessing, even life for ever and ever, thus became his portion. And as with the father, so is it also with the whole generation of those who are "of faith." But the letter *killeth*; for by the law is the knowledge of sin, not of righteousness. It is to sinful man the ministration of death, and could not, therefore, give the life which it unavailingly proposed to such as the reward of its fulfilment. If it could have done this, righteousness, the apostle here admits, should have resulted from the law; or, in other words, God's promise would have proved His justice only, not His grace. But such a supposition, when once sin was in the world, was of plain and sad necessity *absurd*. The immediate object of the giving of the law was, as he has already said, to discover sin by its transgression, and thus to render life a thing impossible to all who trusted in the law.⁷ God's law, therefore, is not against His promises. It

⁶ *Ante*, verse 16.

⁷ Hence the forceful irony of the same apostle's language in Rom. ii. 17, where the self-righteous Jew is said to *rest* in the law.

is designed, on the contrary, by its effective operation on the consciences of God's elect, to enhance the value of those promises for a faith which finds in Christ, not only a full deliverance from the curse, but the end also of the law for righteousness.

Verse 22. "But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe." We have already been listening to the Scripture as an evangelist.⁸ It is now appealed to generally as God's witness against human sin, and as the common jailor of His elect while in their natural condition, as well as of all other men. Reference is here more especially intended to the law of commandments, though the record of Adam's expulsion from Eden, and the oracular declaration of the constitutional depravity of his offspring, both before and after the flood, comprehend by anticipation the positive and specific condemnation by the Mosaic tables of the ways and thoughts of men. The Scripture, then, concluded, or shut up, "the whole"⁹ under sin. God's truth thus became man's prison, while the withering blight of vanity marked everything below the sun. Nor even were the heavens clean until they also felt the purifying virtue of the blood of Christ.¹ But the *intent* of this shutting up under sin is the point to be especially considered here. It was not, as some persuade themselves, against the plainest words of God, with a view to the indiscriminate enlargement and

⁸ *Ante*, verse 8.

⁹ τὰ πάντα—creation and its head; the inferior creature, whether animate or inanimate, following the destiny of him for whose sake it was made. (Compare Rom. viii. 19-23; Col. i. 20.)

¹ Heb. ix. 23, 24.

release of *all* from the captivity of sin, but in order "that the promise (*i.e.* of life) *by faith of Jesus Christ* might be given to them that *believe*." Salvation is of the Lord, and is a thing naturally impossible to men. Where sin is, there is bondage; but when faith comes, there is liberation from that bondage. The bondage is universal, because sin is in the very nature of fallen man. The deliverance is special, because the faith which justifies is not a natural instinct, but the gift of God to His elect.

The promise is directed to the seed of God. But the natural progeny of Adam are not the children of the promise, as has been already fully shown. "The children of the flesh are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted for the seed."² Now, God's children are instrumentally begotten by His word through faith. And so it is again written: "Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by *grace*; to the end the promise might be sure *to all the seed*," &c.³ It is, moreover, evident that grace, or favour, is in its very nature a distinctive thing. Universal in its aspect, as proclaimed in the gospel of God's great salvation, it is effectual to those only who receive it in the love of it, and who, therefore, receive it not in vain. Hence, while offered freely and lovingly to all, upon the sole condition of confessing heartily that Jesus Christ is Lord, the promise is *given* to faith only, which receives the word of grace with understanding and with joy. For a gift rejected is a witness only of the hostile mind of the rejector; and for God's enemies the terrors of His righteous vengeance are prepared. We cannot reason

² Rom. ix. 8.³ Rom. iv. 16.

on these things, for they are not the things of men. Submission to the righteousness of God is what is called for on our parts. His offer is explicit, and if our hearts were naturally capable of appreciating goodness there could not be a second opinion, or a dissenting voice, among the nations of mankind, in the audience of the Spirit's declaration of redeeming love. But nature is dead to God, and so the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God. The charmer charms in vain until the serpent-brood is changed miraculously to the new-born progeny of light.⁴ Deep and unsearchable are the judgments and counsels of Almighty God. His elect are known from others by their own peculiar tokens, and chief among these is their ability, through grace, to justify Him, without mental reserve of any kind, in *all* the true sayings of His word.

"All under sin." Should these pages fall under the eye of a previously careless reader, let him at least pause here, and think well upon the meaning of these words. I would entreat him to remember, however unwelcome and distasteful the conviction may be to his native pride of heart, that he is, until delivered through a willing faith in Christ crucified, *the captive of Satan and born-slave of sin*. The ground on which he walks and has sported himself hitherto in his own vain deceivings, whether religious or irreligious, has been cursed of its Creator for man's sake. Around him on every side are the sorrowful evidences of mortality, and of moral as well as physical wretchedness. That all is vanity below the sun—a truth confessed by philosophers and clowns alike—

⁴ Psalm lviii. 3-5; 1 Peter ii. 9.

is not an original necessity of nature, but a judicial consequence of sin. Let him consider also that even a successful repression of evil inclinations is not a deliverance from the yoke of sin; that he is *himself* carnal and sold under sin; that the mind, which is his natural pride, and conscience, which he peradventure makes his god, are equally darkened and defiled through sin; that God only is light, and that righteousness in man means only a knowledge and fulfilling of his Maker's will. Let him beware of entertaining questions as to election or free-will, but hearken to the only voice that tells him truly either his own real condition or the gracious thoughts of God to man-ward in His Son. Infinite mercy now sues in the gospel for his acceptance, but with a warning that *to-day* only is its opportunity.⁵ Let him above all things shun the lying delusion (beyond all others prevalent in our days) that because Christ is personally "the Saviour of the world," the world is therefore saved. Life and salvation are the portion of the righteous only, who are justified by *faith* and not by reason, while "the whole world," out of which God calls His children by the gospel, "still lieth in the wicked one."⁶ The world and its prince are *judged*, not saved, by Him who now bids sinners turn for safety to Himself. God's kingdom and the kingdom of His Son are not of this world, nor can any enter into rest while "under sin." And all of us are under it, until by faith we flee from ourselves and our false righteousness, as well as our conscious wickedness, to Jesus Christ. Let there be no search nor enquiry, by the awakening soul, for preparatory

⁵ 2 Cor. vi. 1, 2; Heb. iii. 7, *seq.* ⁶ 1 John v. 19.

means of grace. The Saviour is Himself the open door of safety to the lost.⁷ All whom the Father draws are drawn to *Him*, and He casts out none who come to Him in truth. A consideration of our personal unworthiness is, if we think rightly, the strongest of inducements to come boldly to receive what is offered to the needy and unworthy without price. "For when we were yet without strength Christ died for the ungodly."⁸ Such is the manner and such the sincerity of God's love to sinners, who really know themselves as such. Salvation is a change from death to life, because from self to Christ—a denying of the former and a confessing of the latter, because sin is hated and righteousness is loved by every sincere believer. In himself, that is, his flesh, he finds only what he hates, but discovers the object of his heart's desire, and attains the true rest of his weary and self-loathing soul, in the ever-blessed person of the Lamb of God. To return to the apostle's argument.

Verse 23. "But before faith came we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed." This verse describes more immediately the state of God's elect of the circumcision, previously to their reception of the glad tidings of the gospel. The interesting question of the relation of the earlier election to the Church of the presnet dispensation is reserved for discussion in the remarks on verse 3 of the following chapter; their actual condition and consequent inward experience are here chiefly before the apostle's mind. They were guarded under law which, as the strength of

⁷ John x. 9.

⁸ Rom. v. 6.

sin, enclosed and kept them fast (though still as God's prisoners of hope) within the fearful mastery of death.⁹ In John x. we have a living picture of the dissolution of this legal wardship by the advent of the true Shepherd of the sheep. "To Him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear His voice: and He calleth His own sheep by name, and leadeth them out," &c. The personal feeling of such as waited for redemption may be gathered from many a passage in the Psalms and Prophets, in which a profound consciousness of guilt and helplessness, yet withal of godly longing, finds expression for itself in words full of a sure though still deferred hope in God. Historically, the light of deliverance shone first into their house of bondage when their eyes and ears were opened to behold the Hope of Israel in the babe Immanuel, and to hear the tidings which God's angels brought concerning Him from heaven.¹ Its gradual increase, its mortal eclipse, and its triumphant reappearing, to be no more hidden from the eyes of God's true children, are the subject of the Spirit's testimony in the gospels.

Verse 24. "Wherefore the law was our school-master² unto Christ, that we might be justified by

⁹ 1 Cor. xv. 56; Heb. ii. 15. ¹ Luke ii. 9, *seq.*, 25-38.

² *παιδαγωγός* properly, a conductor and guardian of youth, but not their *instructor*. This word is strikingly expressive of the practical function of "the law," as distinguished from "the prophets," whose voices, while ever vindicating Moses and his claims, as constantly asserted the earlier promise; making it the basis of those marvellous utterances which formed and guided the faith of all who, like Nathanael, were Israelites indeed, and taught of God. We should note also the moral contrast between the original meaning of this term and its present application. The duty of the "pedagogue" was to keep his charge from evil acts and

faith." This schooling of the law was properly limited to the election, as distinguished from Israel after the flesh. The many kings and prophets who desired to see God's living Covenant, and lived and died in faith without receiving the promise, learnt, by their own vain efforts to fulfil the law, to thirst the more eagerly for the advent of Him whose going forth was prepared as the morning.³ That their righteousness should be of Him whose law meanwhile condemned them, was the word of comfort that sustained the hearts of Abraham's true children, while the blinded nation and their rulers trusted vainly in the law of works. Law held them fast until its grasp was lawfully removed; and with legal bondage was associated always that gloomy and depressing "fear of death," which nothing can dispel but faith in Him who has abolished death and brought to light both life and incorruption by His own resurrection from the dead. *How* man could be justified, and how the dead should live again, were among the unsolved questions which engaged the exercised and anxious hearts of God's elect. They waited hopefully for God's salvation, like true children of their father Jacob.⁴ Like him too, and his fathers, they embraced by faith a promise too far off for its true shape to be discerned, though of its essential nature they were well aware; for they knew and believed that in Jehovah all the seed of Israel should be justified and should glory in His day.⁵ And when the appointed time

knowledge; but by the law is the knowledge of sin. The one sought to lead children in the path of natural virtue, the other prepares men, through a sound self-knowledge, for the ministry of grace. ³ Hosca vi. 8. ⁴ Gen. xlix. 18. ⁵ Isa. xlv. 25.

drew near, their hope grew also clearer and more positive, as they further meditated the prophetic word. Messiah must be *born* in flesh. A virgin should conceive Immanuel. The child of the nation must be no other than the mighty God; and David's Son must—for so it was written in their law—be also David's Lord. They saw that out of Bethlehem there must come forth One whose goings forth had been from everlasting.⁶ All this anticipative gospel was, in the letter of it, the familiar knowledge also of the guides and rulers of the people. And what a dead national orthodoxy acknowledged and expected wrongly, according to the false imaginations of their own deluded hearts, true faith both rightly estimated as it waited patiently for God, and instinctively received when Jesus came.

Verse 25. "But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster." Faith came, in this sense, when the Son of God appeared. God's truth had a justifying power always, but it was because both law and prophets spake of Him that was to come. The service of the pedagogue expires with the arrival of the true speaker of the words of God. "All the prophets and the law prophesied until John."⁷ In the verse immediately preceding, the apostle had been speaking strictly of the Jewish election, but now, though he continues to contemplate them in the foreground of his view, his words have a more extended and general force. To the Galatians in particular their application is as follows: If Christ had not come, they would have been right in their desire to be under law; for law was con-

⁶ Isa. vii. 14; Micah v. 2.

⁷ Matt. xi. 13.

ducting those who knew it to the true Object of the patriarchal promise. But faith, he reasons, is now come. To desire therefore to be under Moses is to draw back from the fellowship of the true children of the covenant, by taking up the yoke from which they had been just released; for the law is not of faith, but in its nature alien, though subservient, to it. Since faith, then, is come through the revelation of its blessed Object, no true believer can be any longer rightly under legal tutelage. The work of preparation is achieved, because the end to which it pointed is attained. Condition has been swept away by gift; and grace now reigns through righteousness in Jesus Christ our Lord.⁸

Verse 26. "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus." Having led forth the elect Jew, as we have seen, from legal bondage into the righteous liberty of faith, he now discloses to *all* believers, whether circumcised or uncircumcised, and especially to the churches of Galatia, the true glory of their divine title and relationship. "In Christ Jesus ye are sons of God through faith."⁹ The effect of faith in uniting the believer to its Object, and identifying him with the ever blessed Person in whose name he stands, is here clearly and forcibly shown. Sonship is natural to the only begotten of the Father, and to none other. But believers are, in the estimation of the Spirit, where their faith is. They are distinctively "in Christ." They whom the

⁸ Rom. v. 21.

⁹ πάντες γὰρ υἱοὶ Θεοῦ ἐστε, διὰ τῆς πίστεως, ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ.
 "For ye all are sons of God, by means of the faith (of which I have been speaking) in *Christ Jesus*."

Father now draws to the Son receive His *name*, together with His saving grace. We are not children *by* Him only, although this also is true; for by the word of truth we are begotten at His will, and it is of the Spirit that they all are born who see and enter into the kingdom of God. But it is *in* Him of whom the word speaks and the Spirit testifies, and who is Himself their life and hope, that God's believing children stand, and are presented blameless in His sight. In the same "body of the flesh" wherein, through sacrificial death, His sometime enemies were reconciled to God, the glorified Head and forerunner of His church now presents, with an infinite acceptance, to the Father those whom He is not ashamed to call His brethren.¹ It was through losing sight of this all-important principle of the gospel that the Galatians had become exposed to the ensnaring persuasions of the legalists. For so long as we hold, or think we hold, God's blessing in our own persons, it is to ourselves and our works that we naturally look for an increase of that which we already have received.

Verse 27. "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ." From Christ personal he now passes to Christ mystical, yet still keeping the former in the place of due pre-eminence. We may notice first the cast of the apostle's language. He does not say, *because* ye were baptized, but "*as many as* were baptized," &c., leaving room for the inference that not all the people who had received the gospel in Galatia had at that time been baptized. Then, as to the force of his statement, by

¹ Col. i. 21, 22; Heb. iii. 11.

submitting to Christian baptism they had, whether they worthily apprehended it or not, passed ostensibly, by an outward and solemnly impressive rite, into that new condition into which, by faith in Jesus Christ, all who had not believed in vain had been really and for ever brought. By *faith* they were *all* God's children: they who had been baptized had moreover added to their faith this first act of an obedient confession, and by so doing had as it were visibly clothed themselves with Him whose name they bore.²

The import and effect of baptism, when undergone by real believers, is variously stated in Scripture. In 1 Peter iii. 21 we are told its bearing on the individual conscience of the child of God. In Col. ii. 11, 12, it is treated with reference to the absolute change from old to new, as the spiritual realization of the old rite of circumcision, when its true meaning is embraced by faith, the believer being there regarded as both dead and risen with Christ. He is therefore truly circumcised and separate to God, because no longer, as to his new standing, in the flesh, but in the Spirit. In Romans vi. we have the same doctrine enforced, with an especial reference to the believer's *walk*. He is there instructed and exhorted

² With the language of this verse we may compare also that of 1 Cor. x. 2. The fathers were baptized *εἰς τὸν Μωσῆν*; the elect believer is baptized *εἰς Χριστόν*. In the former case they accepted and confessed, as eye-witnesses of His work, God's delegated ruler and commander of His people; in the latter they confess, through faith, the Lord Himself. The Israelites did not "put on" Moses. The servant was personally nothing, while officially great. But Christ is personally *all*, and His offices are expressions only and manifestations of His own intrinsic grace.

to reckon himself "to be dead indeed to sin, and alive to God *in Jesus Christ our Lord.*" In the passage before us a different figure is employed. The baptised believer is said to have "put on Christ." The filthy rags of his own false righteousness are gone. He renounces his former generation and its empty hopes, and by faith assumes the name and honour which belong naturally to the worthy One alone. He is a new creature in Christ Jesus. This description of the effect of baptism will be better understood by referring to his earlier declaration of the effect of faith in his own case.³ Christ lived in him, and he in Christ; and he knew both these things by the Spirit, according to the now fulfilled promise of the Lord.⁴ In like manner the believer, by descending into and again emerging from the waters of baptism, puts off *himself*, with his uncleanness, and takes instead the new and divine garments of salvation; henceforth to walk not as other Gentiles walk, nor in the oldness of the letter, as the "concision," but in newness of the Spirit, according to the grace and power of the Lord in whom he trusts.

But this individual baptism of believers, as confessors severally of the name of Jesus Christ, is to be contemplated always in implied connexion with that other and general baptism of the Church at large by the Holy Ghost, of which the Scripture speaks.⁵ There is one body, which receives the name of "Christ" from Him who is its life and head. There is one Spirit also, by whom all true believers

³ *Ante*, chap. ii. 20.

⁴ John xvi. 20; Rom. viii. 1, 10.

⁵ 1 Cor. xii. 12, 13.

are baptized into the one body of Christ. And this latter truth, although not the immediate topic with which he is dealing, comes out more distinctly in what follows.

Verse 28. "There is in [Him, and consequently among you] neither Jew nor Greek," &c.⁶ The force of these words and their bearing on the state of the Galatians is evident. The effect of their Judaizing had been to revive national distinctions, and even to create others of which they were before unconscious. For the essence of legalism is to insist on the difference between the Jew and the Gentile, and to assert the superiority of the former. Then again, the Jew was bound by law; the Gentile free, though in a false and evil liberty of natural wilfulness. But both these conditions are forgotten in their new standing as in Christ. The Jew's bonds are undone by the dying of the Lord, and the Gentile is no more an alien dog, but has a portion with the children in the blessing of their common God.⁷ In the law, too, the women had a lower place, religiously, than the men. The males were the appointed worshippers at the great national conventions, and the doers of the service of God's sanctuary; the women merely echoing in their subordinate place what men only might originally speak or do. But now males go not up alone to keep God's feasts. Believers of either sex are "heirs together of the grace of life." The presence of the Father, and the throne of grace on which He sits, are accessible to both alike in the same prevailing Name, and by the one indwelling Spirit. "Ye

⁶ οὐκ ἔστι.

⁷ Rom. iii. 20, 30.

are all one [man]⁸ in Christ Jesus," says the apostle. It is a description of their common participation and membership in the mystic unity of Christ's body, the Church. They stand in Him according to the truth and glory of His title as the last Adam; even as they were, though of common origin and nature, diverse and mutually hateful as the children of the first Adam. As a common sin produced all manner of social and moral inequalities, so a common righteousness, and that of God, fills each vessel of His grace out of the exhaustless fulness that is in Christ. If the generation of God's children be a numerous one, yet the life which they have, as His own free and ever blessed gift, is "in His Son."⁹

Verse 29. "And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." Christ's, *what?* The members surely of His mystic body, and thus identified with Him spiritually as the seed. The relation of this verse to His earlier reasoning in verse 16 is obvious. Christ personally is the seed of Abraham, in whom alone the promises can rightly take effect. But what originally was not "many," but "one," becomes a number without number as the fruit of the travail of His soul. Believers are the offspring of the one pure corn of wheat, which by the will of the Eternal Husbandman was committed to the ground in death for our sakes. They stand by a common faith in Him who is not only personally the Lord and giver of life, but the beginning also and

⁸ εἷς. The use of the masculine numeral here is remarkable, and clearly implies what is related in the text. As to the doctrine of the new man in Christ, the apostle has treated it fully in his Epistle to the Ephesians.

⁹ 1 John v. 11.

first-born from the dead, the head of His own body the church.¹ In Christ, then, all who believe are positively Abraham's seed ; and if so, they are heirs also of necessity and according to the exact tenor of the promise made to Him.

In this marvellous manner does the Spirit of grace labour by the pen of this faithful steward of God's mysteries, for the restoration of the "foolish Galatians," and of all others who have since fallen under the power of a like delusion, from their state of unwitting disobedience to the true wisdom of the just. Rebuking sharply their folly and spiritual shortsightedness, which failed to estimate worthily the grace into which they had been called, he yet hastens to their rescue from the fangs of the destroyer, and so handles the sword of the Spirit in their defence as not only to expose and wither the deceivableness of unrighteousness, which sought covertly to turn them from the Spirit to the flesh, but to establish their wandering feet more firmly than before upon the everlasting rock of their salvation. It was good for them to be thus afflicted. For they knew not what they had, in having Christ, until thus shamed from their false longings by this fresh revelation of the manner to themward of the perfect love of God.

The effect of this faithful dealing upon the immediate objects of it was, we cannot doubt, restorative in part at least, though we know not in what measure, nor can we know until the day of Jesus Christ. Let it meanwhile be our care, for whose sakes this epistle was indited, to profit by the warning example of their error, and above all to comfort

¹ Col. i. 18.

our hearts with the strong consolation which the God of all grace has so richly provided here for those who live upon His word.² Let us remember that what God gives, in giving Christ, is nothing less than all He has to give, and that the idea of seeking further than Christ crucified for any other source or means of spiritual blessing is a mere delusion from beneath. It is a turning from light to darkness, from truth to falsehood, and from life to death. In Him faith finds its rest, its portion, and its home. By Him and in His name it has access to the Father in the assured and delighted consciousness of filial acceptance. Staying his mind on Him, the exercised believer can await with patience, and in perfect peace, amid the tribulation which belongs *to* his calling as a joint-heir with his Redeemer, the fulfilling of his hope in the grace which is to be brought to him at the revelation of Jesus Christ.³

² Heb. vi. 17-20; Acts xx. 32. ³ 1 Peter i. 13.

CHAPTER IV.

VERSES 1, 2. "Now I say, That the heir, so long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant," &c. Having in the preceding chapter restored his Gentile brethren in the faith to the place which elective grace had assigned to them in Christ, he now turns again to the natural heir of promise, in order to elucidate with yet further distinctness and precision the way of the only wise God our Saviour, in the manifestation of His faithfulness towards the true children of the covenant. "That Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made to the fathers,"¹ may be said to be the subject of the first five verses of this chapter, which opens with a description of the elect Jew in his state of legal tutelage. Natural custom and analogy are again employed, as heretofore,² to illustrate the manner and dealings of the Spirit. Birth forms the heir, but age is necessary to substantiate his native claim. While a minor, he is treated at the discretion of his parent, according to his actual state and its requirements. He is lord of all, but possesses nothing yet. Submission, and not mastery, belongs to his condition. His education is a *service* on his part to those who are appointed by the father to conduct it. Tutors and governors are his constant companions, and to them he is in strict subjection

¹ Romans xv. 8.² *Ante*, chap. iii. 15.

while his nonage lasts. His fitness for the inheritance depends morally on the success of this preliminary training. He obeys, that he may by obedience learn to rule.

Verse 3. "Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world." This well-understood custom of social life is now applied directly to the case in hand. The Jewish election were always children, and if children, then heirs also, in the purpose and promise of the Father. To Israel nationally pertains "the adoption,"³ into which hereafter they will all be brought. Meanwhile Abraham's true children have wrought from age to age the works of Abraham; that is, they have lived a life of faith. The birthright of their father Jacob was theirs also, and like him and his fellow-heirs, they waited for salvation, and desired a better country, that is an heavenly.⁴ David, the king, was in heart and spirit a pilgrim and stranger upon earth, while all his salvation and all his desire were in the covenant which bound freshly to his soul the promises confirmed to Abraham's seed.⁵ All who were then "of faith" looked, as their first father had looked, for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.⁶ But their view was not as Abraham's was, distinct and bright, though distant—seeing the day of Christ, and rejoicing with an unembarrassed faith in what he saw;—for between them and their remoter expectation there intervened the dark cloud of a broken and death-laden law. With ineffectual strivings they endeavoured to stand up and walk

³ Romans ix. 4. ,

⁴ Gen. xlix. 18; Heb. xi. 16.

⁵ 2 Sam. xxiii. 5.

⁶ Heb. xi. 10.

beneath the intolerable yoke which the generation that followed Moses out of Egypt had ignorantly welcomed, and by which, as their descendants, they were bound. But none who were really born of God ever trusted in the law for righteousness. Religious ignorance could glory, with self-righteous blindness, in the covenant of works, but to the true Israelite it was at once a torment and delight. Apprehending its goodness, and holiness, and justice, and loving inwardly these things, he confessed with anguish his continued and hopeless short-comings, and evermore appealed, in his expressed longings for salvation and its promised hope, from law to grace.⁷

Let us observe, too, the characteristic description which the apostle applies, both here and elsewhere, to the law of Moses. No Jewish prophet, or sound teacher of his faith, could have spoken with propriety of the ordinances under which he lived and sought to serve his generation, as “the elements, or rudiments, of the *world*.” To such they were collectively “the law of *the Lord*,” which, so long as it was unfulfilled, remained as His immediate claim on the obedience of His people. The world to them lay outside Israel, and had evil statutes of its own. By no other voice indeed than that which originally uttered the commandments from the Mount which might be touched, could such language as we have here be employed. It is by the Holy Ghost that Paul thus designates retrospectively the now fulfilled and cancelled law of tables. The accuracy, as well as boldness, of this description is moreover evident on a consideration of the state of those on whom it was imposed. The

⁷ Psalm cxliii. 1, 2.

law was not ordained for a heavenly people but an earthly; for Israel after the flesh, not for those who, as alive to God in Jesus Christ, are by the same witness "not in the flesh, but in the Spirit."⁸ The law did not promise heaven, nor speak of it to those whom it addressed. It was made for sinners, and has reference to life and conduct upon earth. The apostle is here speaking of it, not as he sometimes does in relation to its spiritual character, as an expression of divine holiness and truth, but rather as a positive administration of divine government, having its own distinctive object and result. It is called, therefore, "the elements of the world," because by means of it God dealt, as the Ruler of the nations, with a particular family on earth. It should be noted also that the entire ministration of the law is covered by these words. In Jehovah's name the lawgiver of Israel spake "on earth," and not from heaven.⁹ The statutes, and precepts, and ordinances, whether lustral, or didactic, or commemorative, had all to do with their temporal and actual condition as dwellers upon earth and in the land of their inheritance, while in all these observances there was, to the open ears of God's elect, a voice which spake of higher and eternal things. For such the law had "a promise of good things to come;" but its educational and disciplinary purpose was to break the stiff sinew of natural pride, by causing a self-righteous people to taste misery and condemnation as the fruit of their own way. They must be made at length aware that at Sinai they exchanged Egyptian bondage for a yet heavier yoke, from which a new and altogether different species of

⁸ Rom. viii. 9. ⁹ Heb. xii. 25.

redemption can alone deliver them. And in faithful correspondence to this object of the legal dispensation was the moral state of the elect of the circumcision at the era of Immanuel's birth into the world. The true worshippers of Israel's God were found "looking for redemption" in the city of His name.¹

The verse which we are now considering has also, when read in connexion with its context, an especial interest for inquiring disciples, on account of its direct relation to the much-debated question of the doctrinal limits of the Church, which is Christ's mystic body and His bride. The apostle most distinctly claims here for the Jewish election, while yet under law, the title and expectations of born children of the Father, and shows that their emancipation from the yoke of legal bondage through the gospel was but the bringing them into the enjoyment of their native birthright by the grace of God. There is in the New Testament a clearness and precision in the Spirit's testimony respecting the Church which justly claims the earnest attention of believers, as among the richest of those many "things of Christ" which He has it in charge to show to God's elect. Yet, strange and sad to say, a revelation intended for their common spiritual nurture, and an increase of their common joy, has been too frequently a subject rather of divisive wrangling to those most deeply and immediately interested in it. Nor is it difficult to account for this humiliating fact. The beginning of all such dissension is the change, which so often and so easily takes place in the habit of our minds, from faith to merely inferential reasoning. Whatever is set plainly

¹ Luke ii. 38.

before us in the Scriptures respecting the true standing of believers in the grace of God—the nature and reason of their hope, their singular and collective titles, their place in the eternal counsels of the Father, and the ever-blessed grace and affection of the Son, the mystery of the one new man in Christ, and the manner of the Father's love; in a word, the fulness of Christ as the hope and portion of His chosen—is ministered freely by the Spirit of truth as the proper food of our faith. Green indeed are the pastures whither they who hear His voice are led to rest, and sweet are those deep springs of God from whence the Comforter enables willing souls to draw.² But true spiritual nurture is the effect of our drinking in God's own sure words by faith, while we are more ready often to accept as food our too confident deductions from those words. Both strength and wisdom come from sitting at the Master's feet; they leave us when, unmindful of His presence, we attempt to deal by mental effort only with His things. Avoiding, therefore, all dogmatic conclusions on a subject which the Spirit has not made an immediate and necessary point of our faith, I shall attempt to review here briefly the main features of this interesting question.

That the Church of the New Testament did not *formally* exist until God, by His Spirit, took open possession, on the day of Pentecost, of His living and blood-cleansed temple and assembly, in contradistinction to the building made by hands and the congregation of the dead, is evident upon the face of Scripture.³ While fulfilling the days of His flesh,

² 1 Cor. iii. 10–12.

³ In Acts i. the expectant disciples are a nameless company,

the Son of God had promised both to build and safely keep *His* Church; Himself, as confessed by the faith of His elect, being the eternal Rock of its foundation. Now the doctrine of divine foreknowledge and predestination, as it respects the composition of the Church or body of Christ, presents no difficulty to any spiritual mind. If chosen in Christ at all, it was assuredly, as we are expressly told, in God's thoughts and counsels from eternity;⁴ while as to its constituent members, it is certain that they are drawn, at their appointed season, by regenerative grace and power, from Jews and Gentiles alike. The important inquiry really is this: Seeing that the Church, as a positive truth now ministered to our faith in the New Testament, stands evidently on Christ crucified, and is distinctively the house which the living God inhabits by His Spirit, which Spirit was not given until Christ was glorified, are we at liberty to think and speak of God's earlier people as belonging to the Church? We are told by Christ's earliest martyr that Moses "was in the Church (or assembly) in the wilderness, with the angel which spake to him in Mount Sinai," &c.⁵ But it is evident that this statement does not directly meet our question, though it may have a remote bearing on it; inasmuch as Moses was not only in the assembly or congregation of Israel after the flesh, as their appointed lawgiver and guide, but he was also, with

united only by their common faith and hope. They were the Church, or Assembly, of God, from the time of His manifested power and presence by the Spirit. Thenceforth the Lord adds *daily to the Church*. (Acts ii. 47.)

⁴ 2 Tim. i. 9; Eph. i. 4.

⁵ Acts vii. 38.

Joshua and Caleb, of the election from among the unbelieving nation. God has always had a people who, like Abraham, were bound to Him by faith—the generation, as the Spirit calls them, of Jehovah's children.⁶ And *heirship*, the apostle here insists, is inseparable from the filial relation. But God's children are now God's Church. Are then, once more, our predecessors in the faith to be regarded as members of Christ's mystic body and fulness as expressed in Ephesians i. 23?

Confident, but not always well-considered, answers are often given to this question of an exactly opposite tenor. It is by some assumed, as a sort of spiritual axiom, that, as there is but one Saviour and one righteousness, there can be no real or lasting distinction among the justified and saved. Others assert, perhaps too positively, for the Church of this dispensation an eternal separateness of relation to her Head, and an equally lasting distinction from the rest of God's accepted people, whether earlier or later called.

It will be admitted, by a thoughtful reader at least, that a sound reply to this enquiry involves several important considerations. First, let us above all remember, that it is *in Himself* that Christ makes Jew and Gentile one new man⁷ by means of the common faith which joins His elect, whether circumcised or uncircumcised, unto Himself. If a man, therefore, now believes, he is said to be "in Christ;" his position before God being determined by the Object of his faith. It is He, moreover, who baptizes with the Holy Ghost, having received from the

⁶ Ps. lxxiii. 15.

⁷ Ephes. ii. 15.

Father that which He shed forth visibly at Pentecost.⁸ By that one Spirit, therefore, which is the living seal of every genuine believer, all who now receive the truth in the love of it are included in the one body which bears the name of Him who is its Saviour and its Head.⁹ Of twain He thus in Himself makes one new man. Were the old believers, then, it must be asked, "in Christ"? In God's mind and purpose certainly; and vitally in fact also, since the life which they had, as God's children, was in Christ, in whom all live who live to God.¹ Jehovah has in all generations been the dwelling-place of His elect.² But doctrinally, and in spiritual consciousness, they were not. And here we must distinguish between the clear though remote anticipations of the patriarchs, and the darkened and fear-tormented experiences of their children who were under law. The death-laden cloud of Sinai intercepted, but could not obliterate, the light of that bright day which gladdened Abraham's heart.³ Out of the shades of death they called for Him who should quicken them and give them His own likeness in due time.⁴ And it is the last Adam who is the quickening Spirit, giving life more abundantly *in person* than was or could be known to those who lived only upon God's prophetic words.⁵ When faith rose to its just measure in the true children of the covenant, they rejoiced in God, both as the strength of their hearts and as their portion for ever; but the work was yet unwrought

⁸ John i. 33; Acts ii. 33. ⁹ 1 Cor. xii. 12, 13; Eph. v. 23.

¹ John i. 4; 1 Cor. xv. 22. ² Psalm xc. 1.

³ John viii. 56. ⁴ Psalm lxxx. 18; cxix. 40; xvii. 15.

⁵ 1 Cor. xv. 45; John x. 10.

which should deliver them from the power of darkness. Their hope was *sure*, but far off still. A law-hampered faith could never justify nor give unclouded peace.

We shall return to this part of our subject presently. In the meanwhile it may be asked, Is there not a special sense in which that body of God's saints whom now the Spirit speaks of and deals with as "the Church," and betroths them as a chaste virgin to Christ,⁶ is contemplated as holding an abidingly distinct and paramount place in the now declared counsels of God? That this is so will, I think, be allowed by all who read with an opened eye and receive with a ready mind the words of God. For first it will be admitted, as an obvious principle, that distinctive privileges are exclusive also in their nature. Thus a Jew, though equally a child of Adam, could not be a Gentile; nor a Gentile a Jew. Again, it is among the millennial promises in store for the now widowed and, as she thinks, *forgotten* Zion, that her Maker shall yet be her husband, and that He will rest there in His love.⁷ We have here most distinctly a promise which remains within its own prescribed limits, as addressed expressly to that part of God's redeemed family which it describes, and which cannot, from the nature of it, belong to others. And this is a sample only of what abounds in the treasury of unrepented promise. Now, *millennial* distinctions are limited and temporal, but the Comforter, who reveals to us our portion in the Son of the Father, tells us of things both higher and beyond.

⁶ 2 Cor. xi. 2.

⁷ Isaiah liv. 5; lxii. 4, 5; Zeph. iii. 17.

Applying then, this principle to what is written of the Church, and remembering that the blessings with which believers are now blessed in heavenly places in Christ are spiritual and not temporal, it is evident that "Body" and "Bride" are terms which, beyond most others, convey to our minds the ideas of completeness, of exclusion, and of endurance. There is a stature to be attained by Christ's mystic body, and there is an appointed day of espousals for the presentation to Himself of His glorious and unspotted Church. But Christ's body is His *fulness* also,⁸ which, once reached, can never be diminished nor enlarged. The glory of God is the hope of our calling, and it is as "partakers" or "associates" of Christ that His true disciples both suffer here, and are to reign with Him hereafter. For the calling of believers by the gospel is expressly "into the fellowship of the Son of God."⁹ Now it is quite clear, from the multiplied testimony of Scripture, that the faith and patience of the Church receives its crown at the second advent of the Lord, and that what the now groaning creation waits for, with an earnest expectation, is the manifestation of those who are called in an especial sense "the sons of God."¹ In the prophetic eye of the Spirit however, *Ephraim* is also a dear Son, and a pleasant child, and repudiated Israel shall yet be put among the children, and shall call upon the Father.² Their land also shall be married, as we have seen. In other words, filial adoption and marriage are among the covenanted mercies of the Jew. But Jacob will enter safely on his heritage in the day only when the

⁸ Eph. i. 23.⁹ 1 Cor. i. 9; Heb. iii. 14.¹ Rom. viii. 19.² Jer. xxxi. 20; iii. 19.

kingdom under the whole heaven shall have passed into the hands of Christ, and of those who are to reign with Him. And we know that the Lamb's wife is ready, and the marriage kept in heaven, before the King of kings and Lord of lords assumes openly His power and rides forth, with His elect companions, to be the Judge and God of the whole earth.³

Most evidently, then, there is a *prospective* limitation of the Church. She will sit in her glorified completeness as the partner of the reigning Christ, when ransomed Israel, and the Gentiles who will then acknowledge them in their covenanted supremacy of earthly blessing, and be sharers also of their joy, will be confessing the true David as their king.⁴ It remains therefore only to enquire, Is this limitation retrospective also? We have already seen that all God's "living" are in Christ, the last Adam, the second and true *Man*. It is certain also that the just men to whom God bears witness, and who ran before us in the race of faith, are not separated, in their now perfected condition, from us for whom God provided in His sovereign grace the "better thing." That their perfection is ours also is declared positively and with great distinctness.⁵ But in the Spirit's enumeration of

³ Rev. xix.

⁴ Ezekiel xxxvi., xxxvii.

⁵ ἵνα μὴ χωρὶς ἡμῶν τελειωθῶσι. (Heb. xi. 40.) It is important to remark that the better thing which God provided (or foresaw) for us has reference in this passage, not to the eventual results of redemption, but to the comparative dispensational standing and experience of the redeemed. What was indistinct and distant to *them* is bright and close to us: the promise of the Spirit for which they waited is fulfilled in us who now believe; the Christ they hoped for, as one unrevealed as yet, is now *in* us the hope of glory, &c. But this affects in nowise the remote purpose of His counsel who redeemed both us and them through Christ. The natural in-

the things to which we, as believers, are now come, "the Church of the first-born" is distinguished from "the spirits" of those same just men.⁶ To infer however from this that their perfection differs from our own would be to make the Spirit contradict Himself; for we have just seen that they were not to be perfected apart from us. Nor could they be, since for them or us perfection is found only in the common object of our faith. Yet to us belongs a priority of true Christian standing, since to us was first preached, in its fulness and unclouded brightness, "the glorious gospel of the blessed God." If they therefore are brought into our fellowship, it is by a retrospective operation of the same grace which now justifies them absolutely in Him for whom they looked. They were before us in order of time, we are before them in order of calling; the darkness being past, and the true light now shining in the face of Jesus Christ. Thus distinctness of description becomes reconcileable with community of blessing; and it is to be further noted that in the very same passage "the heavenly Jerusalem," which is also the Bride, the Lamb's wife, appears *with* "the Church of the first-born." The mother and the children both are there,⁷ and these are not separate, but one. But of this more presently. Looking still to God's earlier elect, if predestination,

ference from the above-quoted words appears to be that the two great classes of the household of faith—those before and those after the first coming of the Lord—though differing materially in the terms of their immediate calling, and in the manner and measure of their experimental knowledge of the one God of their salvation, are united finally, and found where Paul desired to be found, "in Christ." (1 Phil. iii.)

⁶ Heb. xii. 23.

⁷ *Infra*, verse 26.

calling, and now justification also in its completeness, must needs be predicted of these, is glory to be refused? For it is written, that "whom He justified, them He also glorified."⁸ And we have already seen, that to wake up in Christ's likeness was the hope of His elect of old.

It is scripturally clear also that, relatively to them that shall come after, the Church *now* is "a kind of first-fruits of God's creatures."⁹ We are "fore-hopers" also in Christ,¹ in comparison with the multitude who, in the dispensation of the fulness of times, shall rejoice with restored and remarried Jerusalem, when the vail has been taken from her children's hearts. But are not these characteristic expressions descriptive rather of the dispensational peculiarity of the Church's calling, than of a difference of essential standing and lasting relationship to Christ from that of the Fathers who embraced the promise from afar? If we turn now again to the heavenly Jerusalem, and note the symbolic description of that which is both the bride of the Lamb and the city of His God,² we shall find indications which seem strongly to point to this conclusion. She is founded, as the Church is, on the twelve apostles of the Lamb; but her open gates are kept by angels who bear, not their own names, but those of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel.³ There is surely a meaning in these things. What I believe to be conveyed by them is this: The

⁸ Rom. viii. 30.

⁹ James i. 18.

¹ προηλπικότες ἐν τ. Χ. Eph. i. 12. ² Rev. iii. 12; xxi. 9.

³ Rev. xxi. 12. It is doubtful whether the gates or the angels are so inscribed, but this does not affect at all the conclusion drawn in the text.

gospel, as the apostles preached it, gives the truth on which all rests; but if we wish an entrance to the city of the living God, we must be partakers of the patriarchal faith.⁴

By not a few modern Christians it is held as a fixed principle of interpretation, that the Fathers are in the kingdom but are not of the Church, that they are heirs of glory and partakers of the heavenly calling, but are not of "the body," &c. But assertions of this kind strike me as more bold than safe. Without discussing now at length the grounds of the first of these assumptions, I shall here merely note that the kingdom of God, in which Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets have their place, is most clearly proposed as the calling also and inheritance of the New Testament believer.⁵ In other words, the doctrine of the Church and that of the kingdom of God are but different aspects of the one gospel of the grace of God. There is indeed a difference. The "Church" was never *preached* by our Lord or His apostles; the "kingdom of God" was so from the beginning. It was the constant burden of His own testimony in the days of His flesh, as well as of that of His forerunner. It was the one comprehensive subject also of His communications with His chosen in the interval between His resurrection and His visible re-ascension into heaven.⁶ It was, in fact, by the preaching of the kingdom that the Church was formed; for the gospel of the kingdom is, that Jesus Christ is Lord,⁷ and the Church is but the aggregate

⁴ Heb. vi. 12; Rom. iv. 23-25.

⁵ Luke xiii. 28; Eph. v. 5; 1 Thess. ii. 12.

⁶ Acts i. 2, 3.

⁷ Acts ii.; Phil. ii. 10, 11.

of them that call in faith upon His name. When we lose sight historically of the apostle, a part of whose distinctive boast it was to be a minister of the Church, he is still "preaching the kingdom of God," as he had ever been.⁸ It was a common end for which both he and his fellow-workers in the gospel wrought.⁹ Pursuing this topic now no further, I shall close the present brief enquiry by a reference to the two epistles which deal more expressly with the economy or dispensation of the mystery of God.

In that addressed to the Ephesians, the once strangers from the covenants of promise are told that through their faith in Christ they are become "fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God."¹ That Gentiles should be "fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of God's promise by the gospel," is affirmed to be a previously hidden mystery.² The mystery of Christ and His relations to His Church, of which the whole epistle is full, is declared moreover to be "great." That he may boldly and worthily make known the mystery of the gospel is the apostle's chief anxiety, for relief of which he asks earnestly the prayers of those to whom he writes.³ The saints also and faithful brethren at Colosse are taught in like manner to give thanks to the Father who had made them meet to be "partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light." That Christ is now, in believing Gentiles, the hope of glory is both

⁸ Acts xxviii. 31.

⁹ Col. iv. 11.

¹ Eph. ii. 12, 19.

² God's Church, or assembly, it should be well remembered, is not in *itself* the mystery of which the apostle is here speaking, but rather its actual constitution, through the incorporation into it of the Gentiles who are called.

³ Eph. iii. 6; v. 32; vi. 19.

asserted and largely dwelt on in the same epistle as a rich and glorious mystery. The apostle suffers for it, and acknowledges its promulgation as his special charge. As an inspired teacher he makes additions to God's written word respecting it, &c.⁴

But this being so, it yet remains to ask, Who are "the saints" into whose blessed fellowship these once godless Gentiles are so marvellously brought? Can this holy title of acceptance be confined to those only who received the Gospel in its fulness? Most surely it cannot. God's saints have always been His pilgrims upon earth, His anointed also, and His prophets. In His hands they have been held, and He has kept their feet from the beginning.⁵ To such the goodness of God's holy One extended, and they will be gathered before Him when He comes to judge. Their death was ever precious in His sight, and in His glory they shall have the fulness of their joy.⁶ Now we are not, as believers, called to the companionship of angels, but firstly of the Lord Himself; and secondly, as we here see, to that of the saints whose inheritance is said to be "in light." If it be asked, What light? one answer only can be given. God is the light of His own dwelling-place, and the city which contains no temple is enlightened by the Lamb. The Lord has been, and is, and will for ever be His people's light, whether earth or heaven be the place of their abode.⁷ What expectant Christian faith is soon to have was shown in sample to Peter and his fellows on the holy mount.

⁴ Col. i. 2, 24-27. ⁵ Deut. xxxiii.; 1 Sam. ii. 9; Psalm cv. 15.

⁶ Psalm xvi. 3, l. 5; Psalm cxvi. 15, cxlix. 5.

⁷ Rev. xxi. 23, xxii. 5; Psalm xxvii. 1; Isa. lx. 1, 19.

When Moses and Elias vanished from the eyes of the disciples they were hidden by the excellent glory of the Father.⁸

It will here perhaps be said, the transfiguration is an earnest of the power and coming of the Lord, not of His special relation to the Church. I answer, in that case, that the Church is, in the language of the New Testament, the assembly of *God's saints*; and that it is with *all* His saints—that is to say, His Church in its completeness—that the Lord will manifest the power and glory of His kingdom at His second coming.⁹ Both individually and collectively we Gentile believers are taught now by the Spirit to rejoice in our meetness, by God's special grace, for participation in the inheritance of His saints in light. And we have just seen that His earlier saints are, with ourselves, both in His hand and in His light. Has he, then, *two* assemblies of believing saints in light? and does fellowship, consequently, mean separation and distinctness also in this case? Are the saints whose bodies started from their tombs when Jesus yielded up the ghost¹ not found among the living stones of which He builds His Church? I cannot think this, for my part. And when too it is written of Moses, that he esteemed "*the reproach of Christ* greater riches than the treasures in Egypt,"² are we to separate this suffering faith from the fellowship of those who now take pleasure in a like reproach;³ or count the eyes of him who "endured as seeing Him that is invisible" too dim to descry the sure though remote object of his hope? It was,

⁸ 2 Peter i. 16-18; Luke ix. 34.

⁹ 1 Thess. iii. 13.

¹ Matt. xxvii. 51-53.

² Heb. xi. 25.

³ 2 Cor. xiii. 10.

we are assured, the discovery by faith of the heavenly country and the city of foundation that made the early patriarchs confess that they were strangers and pilgrims *upon earth*; and David, in the act of dedicating his provision for the temple made with hands, declares himself, with all who shared his faith, a sojourner and stranger upon earth *as they*.⁴ The fulfilment of earthly promise could not satisfy the cravings of a heart that knew and waited for the rest of God.

In the foregoing chapter the Jewish election are described as having been shut up under law to the faith which was afterwards to be revealed.⁵ Now, the whole argument of the apostle in that chapter goes to prove that a promise, if of God, will surely take effect. The true object of the promise, as he there insists, is Christ; and its blessing is on those who, whether before or since the first coming of the Lord, receive God's words in faith. It will be admitted by those who know God that His free promise, if absolute and general in its terms, must carry in it, to *His* mind, the full measure of His own power and intent to bless. And such was His word to Abraham. "Blessing I will bless," is both a present benediction and an indefinite promise of good; conveying no measured portion to him who is the father of all who are of faith. "*I am thy shield and thine exceeding great reward,*" are words which carry in them all the possibilities of known and unknown blessedness for him to whom they were addressed. Now the Spirit calls the Abrahamic promise the inheritance of those who, though children, were as slaves for an appointed

⁴ 1 Chron. xxix. .5.

⁵ Chap. iii. 23.

time. When the time arrives the promise is fulfilled. The heir becomes of full age, and is acknowledged of the Father. And if Gentiles, naturally strangers from the covenants of promise, are now blessed through faith, it is, he says, "with faithful Abraham." If, then, in the unrolling of the long-recorded promise, and the disclosure of its rich contents, there is the unravelling also of a mystery not told before, but hidden in the God who blessed Abraham absolutely and without reserve, are the earlier heirs of promise, who both lived and died in faith, and who are declared by the Spirit to be *now inheriting* what then they waited for,⁶ excluded from an eventual share in this unlooked-for grace? Let us remember that God gave *Himself* to Abraham; and that boundless gift became the heritage of those who followed in the steps of Abraham's faith.

An argument has been sometimes drawn from the apostle's language on various occasions, when speaking of the Church and her actual standing in the grace of God as the fruit of an *eternal purpose*. No mention was made to the fathers, whom God called, of the economy of the mystery which is now made known to us, and it is thence inferred that His purpose concerning the earlier and later generations of the heirs of promise is distinct. That "the last shall be first" is also rightly remembered as a principle of divine dealing with men. Grace is sovereign, and con-

⁶ τῶν δ. π. κ. μ. κληρονομοῦντων τὰς ἐπαγγελίας. (Heb. vi. 12.) They did not receive it in their lifetime; they are come to it in Christ, who for their sakes and ours has ascended up on high. Their inheritance attends inseparably the "perfection" which is its moral title in the sight of God.

siderations of natural probability have properly no weight in our estimation of this question.

There is at least plausibility in this view of the subject, but it will hardly bear, I think, a close inspection. First let us notice in what terms the evolution of this original elective purpose is expressed by the apostle. "Having predestinated us," he says to the Ephesian saints, "*unto the adoption of children* by Jesus Christ unto Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will,"⁷ &c. But this puts them at once side by side with those who were always sons, though unacknowledged, while their nonage lasted, as God's heirs. And it is surely needless to insist that the doctrine of eternal election applies as forcibly to Abram as to Paul. God has no after-thoughts, but knows the end from the beginning, and works His pleasure at the motion of a will which is as ancient as Himself. Christ only is His original and personal "elect." All others who are chosen are chosen, and find their acceptable standing everlastingly *in Him*. Ephesian doctrine, even where to some minds it may seem to differ from Galatian, ought not to be separated from it, but each should be studied not in its own light only, but in that also of the other. For all inspired writings are but parts of the record which God hath given of His Son. Such teaching as we have in the Epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians is but a rolling away of intervening clouds and a bringing into faith's immediate view of the form and pattern of the blessing which God pronounced of old on Abram and His seed. Christ the true seed, once made a curse for our sakes, is made most blessed for

⁷ Eph. i. 5.

ever in the full fruition of His heart's desire;⁸ and, if true believers, we are fully blessed in Him. He has passed through the heavens, and has set His glory far above them all. And where He is, His now perfected people also are in Him. For He is their life and their head, their forerunner and their hope. His gladness is their own also, though differing in kind as well as measure, since the joy of the Redeemer must be both deeper and fuller than the joy of the redeemed.⁹ The God to whom He is ascended is both His and theirs, and beyond all doubt the "God of Abraham" also. There is none other than the God of glory who appeared to him; and His glory is His Christ. And we are to the praise of His glory who first trusted in Him whom Israel disallowed. But He was also Abraham's trust and David's, who beheld in the prospective brightness of that glory both all his salvation and all his soul's desire.¹

God's church or assembly is purchased by His blood, and what its members now have as a present assurance the fathers counted on in hope.² The God of Abraham was his *Redeemer* also, asserting this claim in the prophetic Scripture not as a futurity, but as a thing already done.³ For in His own mind His purpose and His acts are one. The Spirit of *Christ* was in the prophets, and witnessed by them, not His sufferings only, but His *glories* also, one and all.⁴ It was *His* dead body that should come again to life in His resuscitated saints.⁵ But the prophets

⁸ Psalm xxi. 2-6; Heb. v. 7.

⁹ Acts xx. 35; Heb. i. 9.

¹ 2 Sam. xxiii. 4, 5.

² Acts xx. 25; Eph. i. 7.

³ Isa. xxix. 22.

⁴ 1 Peter i. 11, *τὰς μ. τ. δόξας*.

⁵ Isa. xxvi. 19.

had and held by faith much more than they intelligently tasted or possessed. To *us* they ministered, as Moses did. But like him also they hoped and suffered still for *Christ*. The darkness is now passed, and the promise is become a fact. Christ in the heavenlies is now revealed to our faith as the head of His body the Church. But we are expressly taught by the apostle that what elect Gentiles now partake by grace was looked and waited for, as "the promise of God in Christ," by the fathers.⁶ The hope of eternal life, for which we wait⁷ now by the Spirit, is the same promise of life for which they also waited. We indeed have it as they had it not; but the difference is in manner, not in kind. What God *meant* by His promise we now know by the Spirit that is given us. They did not, but it was the same. A promise fulfilled differs in form, but not in substance, from a promise unexplained. Faith fed then as now upon God's words, and found its strength and portion in *Himself*. Their schooling was *to* Christ; ours is *in* Christ, to the Father and His ways. The manner of His love which we behold now by our faith, and taste through the earnest of the Spirit, will presently be known to its utmost fulness by the *many* sons whom He is bringing to His glory.

We should beware of rigidly *defining* what the Scripture reveals only and declares. Is the eternal purpose which God purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord⁸ to be limited in its effect to those only, and their followers, to whom the mystery was first disclosed? This is not said in Scripture. When Christ said, "Upon this rock will I build my Church," He

⁶ Eph. iii. 6. ⁷ 2. Tim. i. 1; Titus i. 2. ⁸ Eph. iii. 11.

gave the name, but not the measure nor materials of His intended building, the plan of which had been from everlasting in His thoughts. The apostle prays that Gentile believers may know the hope of God's calling, and the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.⁹ But this does not by any necessity imply that we only who are thus addressed are comprehended in this calling. God's *saints* are His inheritance; but they are many more than we who now believe, as has been shown. The Church, which is Christ's body and fulness, is the assembly also of the living God; a house of living stones which He has founded on his own elect, and tried, and precious Stone. Are Abraham and the prophets out of that assembly, and no more to be reckoned among the living jewellery of God?¹ But if we believe them to be living stones, they are also of God's building, which is assuredly His Church. To me it appears evident, that if Christ mystical consists of the Lord and those in whom His Spirit dwells, then by all consistent reasoning, unless faith is to be made void, and the promise, in hope of which the fathers died, to become of none effect, they also are partakers of its membership. For the promise was the promise of the *Spirit*, and the Spirit is the spirit of adoption. But to think and speak of just men now perfected in Christ, and to suppose them still without that spirit, is beyond my own ability at least.²

Like ourselves, our forerunners and examples in the faith were "saved by hope."³ Like us, too, they

⁹ Eph. i. 18.

¹ Malachi iii. 17.

² *Ante*, page 195, note.

³ Rom. viii. 24; Heb. xi. 13.

are heirs of salvation and of promise.⁴ If *they* received not the promise, the same is not less true of *us*;⁵ though we have its earnest in the Spirit of adoption, which they then had not. Now the promise for which they looked, and which is now become to our faith the "gift unspeakable," for which we give God thanks,⁶ is CHRIST in all His blessed fullness. The heirs, therefore, and partakers of that common promise, have a manifest unity of interest as well as hope. And of this united aggregate of God's called and chosen heirs of grace consists, I am persuaded, that "Church," or assembly of God, which is the mystic "body" also of His Christ.

I find, then, on examining this subject, first, that the final limitation of the body of Christ to the saints of the New Testament is destitute of any direct, and therefore conclusive, scriptural authority; and, secondly, that the teaching of Scripture, so far as I am capable of apprehending it, conducts me to an opposite conclusion.⁷

It must be left to the sober-minded reader of the above remarks to form his own judgment on their value in the sight and fear of God. I presume not to write as with authority upon the question now

⁴ Heb. i. 14, vi. 12, 17. ⁵ Heb. x. 36. ⁶ 2 Cor. ix. 15.

⁷ Free use has been made, on both sides of this controversy, of the symbolic picture of the fruits of redemption contained in the earlier chapters (chaps. iv.-xv.) of the Apocalypse. I have made no reference to these, because the proper basis of a doctrinal position is not symbolical illustration, but direct and positive testimony. A blessing is pronounced upon the reader and the hearers of that final record of God's sayings, and on all who lay up what is there written in their hearts. To advance beyond this, and attempt an exposition in detail of its inspired imagery, has hitherto resulted only in failure more or less complete.

before us; nor do I think that godly edifying which is "*in-faith*,"⁸ and not by natural reasoning, is likely to be furthered by attempts at its definitive solution. The present calling and experience of God's saints is of necessity distinctive and peculiar, and is in Scripture called "a mystery." To the initiated, that mystery is now revealed; but our knowledge of it, though accurate as far as it extends, may not, peradventure, be *exhaustive*. That it is by no means perfect yet, is evidently proved by the existing diversity of judgment; and the fitting companions of imperfect knowledge are reserve and modesty. Let us meanwhile make much of what we do know, and of which we are assured. Christ and His love are the present food of our faith, and also our sure and ever blessed hope. Our wisdom, as children of light, is to cleave to God's testimonies whose righteousness is everlasting,⁹ and shun doubtful disputations, which oftener result in strife than in the growth of love and peace. May we await patiently the arrival of that day which is to bring the Lord Himself, according to His promise, and with Him the settlement of every doubt. Let believers, then, while holding, with a watchful and jealous tenacity, the truth and glory of their own distinctive calling, as the suffering fellows of their Lord, abandon their souls without reserve to the assured and heart-cheering conviction that, whatever forms (as yet unknown)¹ the sovereign good pleasure of the Father may assume in the great day of revelation and fulfilment of our hope, they are bound, both in vital union and companionship of blessing, not only in the bundle of life with their Redeemer,

⁸ 1 Tim. i. 4.⁹ Psalm cxix. 144.¹ 1 John iii. 2.

but inseparably also with those who aforetime have obtained a good report through faith. They are called to inherit a blessing, and both are, and will be, "blessed with faithful Abraham." We know now in part only, and are while in this tabernacle still, "as new-born babes," to desire and to live on "the sincere milk of the word."² When, in a very little while, our eyes are opened on the things eternal and unseen, we shall find indeed that no true spiritual feeling or desire on our parts has ever been at fault, while our thoughts on many a subject may haply undergo an unexpected but assuredly most welcome change.³

From this long digression, which however I can hardly think superfluous, I now gladly return to the apostle's words.

Verse 4. "But when the fulness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under law." The moral relation of law to grace is made strikingly apparent in this verse. The promise was confirmed, as we have seen, "to Christ" as the true seed. But its manner of fulfilment must accord

² 1 Peter ii. 2.

³ The ill-consequences of rash conclusions on things not perfectly revealed have been often witnessed, and are felt most distressingly in our own day, when men are for the most part swifter to speak than to hear and to consider. But it should be remembered that dogmatic assertion, in the absence of clear scriptural testimony, is worse than an error of judgment. It is a darkening of divine counsel, and a hurtful misleading of men's souls. We do well therefore not only to oppose with earnestness the existing tendency to treat divine doctrines as mere subjects of debate, but to shun also the opposite error of accepting merely human teaching as a resting-place for faith. The length of the disquisition in the text is due to the prevalence of the latter habit in many quarters with respect to the exclusive theory of the Church or body of Christ.

with the actual condition of those for whose sakes it had been made, and on whom it was destined, in the counsels of divine grace, to take eventual effect. Now this was, as he insists, a state of hopeless legal bondage, which continued till the cry of the prisoners went up, as of old, out of the furnace of their affliction into the ears of Abraham's God. Their eyes failed with waiting for salvation, as they groaned beneath the burden of an utterly intolerable yoke. Centuries of physical bondage preceded the deliverance from Egypt, and longer centuries of sin's dominion had to pass before the long-promised Liberator came. The pressure of the covenant of death upon their souls was a needed preparation for the advent of Him who was to finish transgression and make an end of sin; and to take in His own person the blessing of the Abrahamic promise, through His fulfilment of the earlier burden of destruction which was addressed to the serpent in the hearing and on behalf of his original victims. By the law is the knowledge of sin, and sin is itself the work of the devil; but the Son of God was manifested to destroy, as the champion and Saviour of His chosen, both the devil and his works. The victory of deliverance, however, could only be achieved by the just One in full and harmonious recognition of what God had in the meanwhile given by the hands of Moses. If the law came in, as it were surreptitiously,⁴ to bar the heirs of their inheritance of promise, its claims should be met openly and to the full, by Him who came like Moses, but in a different sufficiency, to look upon the burdens of His brethren. Let none think otherwise. He came

⁴ παρεισῆλθεν. (Rom. v. 20.)

not, He has told us, to destroy the law and the prophets, but to fulfil them both.⁵ Moreover when the Son came forth at the appointed time it was to do a higher will than His. It was the Father's business that consumed His strength. He had received a commandment, and as He heard He spake.⁶

The strength of sin should be encountered and vanquished by the obedience unto death of Jesus Christ. By man should come deliverance, as by man had come the bondage of both sin and death. The eternal Son, whose native likeness was the form of God, came forth from the Father to show Himself to human eyes in the body which had been prepared of God for Him. And it is of much importance to weigh well the apostle's language when speaking of this mystery. God, he says, "*sent forth His Son*, made of a woman, made under the law," lest any should imagine that Christ's sonship dates only from the incarnation of the living Word. He *was*, before His mission—*who* and *what* He personally was, are presented to us in His visible and tangible humanity. The Word was made flesh. The Word of life was seen, beheld and handled in the person of the virgin's Son. "Made of a woman," is a true description of Immanuel, the incarnate Son of God. "Made under the law," represents with equal fidelity the nation's child. For though Israel, as seen in Christ, be Jehovah's first-born, and Ephraim be still remembered as a dear son in the bowels of elective mercy and unrepented promise,⁷ he was and is as a home-born slave,⁸ while under the Mosaic covenant. If therefore a deliverer

⁵ Matt. v. 17.

⁶ John v. 30; xii. 50.

⁷ Jeremiah ii. 14.

⁸ Exodus iv. 22; Jeremiah xxxi. 20.

from such a bondage was to come forth from the stem of Jesse, He must needs be born in the condition in which the nation was; that is, under the law. But its dominion over Him was not like its dominion over them. For while they languished under its curse, He took it, not as it lay on them, a broken law, both attesting and punishing their iniquity, but according to the exceptional character both of His birth and nature; receiving it from the dead hands of Moses whom it slew, to place it (as a muniment and witness of eternal life for those who seek and find it there), in the shrine of His own unspotted heart. He whose essential name is Holy, was in the verity of His humanity "born under law." That which was "made for sinners" was undertaken by the just One for the sake of sinners, and in the likeness outwardly of sinful flesh. To Him it was no yoke of bondage, but purely a natural delight. The effects of its curse He witnessed everywhere, and in gracious sympathy He wept with them that wept, Himself taking our infirmities and bearing our sicknesses,⁹ while in the strength of His own righteousness He spoiled the destroyer of His goods. Going about, in the power of the unction which He had received, He did good, and healed all that were oppressed of the devil.¹ But the will of the Father would lead His obedient Son not only into helpful contact with mortality and human griefs. To compass the long foreshadowed counsel of the God of Israel, His Elect, in whom His soul delighted, must be numbered with transgressors, and the Prince of

⁹ Matt. viii. 17; John xi. 35.

¹ Acts x. 38.

life be left for an appointed while among the dead. And so, he proceeds, this mission of the Son was—

Verse 5. "To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." "Redemption," like its correlative "Salvation," is, in the language of the Holy Ghost, a term of wide as well as positive significance, and has both its present and its final sense. In Christ believers have redemption *now*, the forgiveness of their sins.² In Christ also they *look for it*, in the day of their expected change.³ "The redeemed of the Lord" are they who alone utter, whether now or hereafter, on earth or in heaven, His true praise.⁴ In the line of the apostle's present argument this verse applies more directly, of course, to the believer of the circumcision, although it is to be remembered that Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to *every* believer.⁵ But it was to declare God's righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through His forbearance; and specifically "for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first covenant," that the Heir of promise gave Himself to death, the declared end of that ever-blessed sacrifice being "that they which are *called* (whether of Israel or of the Gentiles) might receive the promise of eternal inheritance."⁶ "To the Jew first" is the order of the ministration of the Gospel. "He sent redemption to *His people*;"⁷ to be rejected indeed by the nation at large, until the time of restitution come, but accepted and gloried in by the remnant according to the election of grace. The latter clause of this verse is of wider application

² Eph. i. 7. ³ Rom. viii. 23. ⁴ Psalm cvii. 2; Rev. v. 9.

⁵ Rom. x. 4. ⁶ Rom. iii. 25; Heb. ix. 15. ⁷ Psalm cxi. 9.

than the former; the receiving of the adoption of sons being a result which attended the fulfilment not only of the promise to the fathers, but also of the anticipative gospel to the Gentiles of which he has already spoken;⁸ while the form and value of the promised blessing are according to the manner of the love which gave effect to it. The *Son* could bestow no lesser benefit, by His own blessed work of grace, than a full revelation of the Father, and an initiation of His redeemed into the fellowship of His own filial name and title; for He gave *Himself* for our sins according to the will of *God our Father*.⁹

Verse 6. "And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your¹ hearts, crying, Abba, Father." The general doctrine of redemption and its fruits is now applied personally to the Galatian saints. Both rebuke and consolation find expression in his words. They were plainly taking far too low an estimate of the nature of the grace wherein they stood, and in their blameworthy ignorance had set themselves earnestly to seek a servant's place; unmindful of the true hope of their calling, and forgetting that they were already sons. He now reminds them of their high and final standing in such a manner as to appeal also to their better spiritual consciousness. The Spirit of Christ had moved their hearts to filial worship ere the voice of the stranger had assailed their ears with his false and self-flattering persuasions. Under Paul's teaching they cried, "Abba;" but that cry was silenced in their vain contentions for the crown of legal right-

⁸ *Ante*, chap. iii. 8.

⁹ *Ante*, chap. i. 4.

¹ S.V.A. give "our."

eousness. Nor would the adversary have prevailed with his enchantments had they watchfully continued in the love of Christ. For the sending of the Spirit of His Son into the hearts of them that call upon His name is the answer to the prayer of Jesus, that the Father would keep *through His own name* those whom He had given to His Son.² He had manifested that name to His chosen while with them in the world, and had taught them also how to pray the children's prayer; and that its true power and meaning might be tasted in their hearts, the Spirit of adoption was sent forth. Being come, that blessed Spirit is, to the believer, both the revealer of the things of Christ, and the enabling power of his heart's communion with the Source from whence this other Comforter is come.

But the best things are, alas! the things most easily let slip. Without giving diligence we cannot make our calling and election sure. Neglected privilege becomes a snare. The Spirit is grieved by slothfulness as well as sin, and weakness and exposure of soul are the result. The Hebrews had relaxed their earnestness in the pursuit of their true hope, and had forgotten the exhortation which addresses us as children.³ In like manner the zeal of the Galatians had waned with the departure of the apostle from among them, and their souls became in consequence entangled in the net of the deceiver.⁴ Distance in heart and spirit from the God whom they thus wrongly served, was the inevitable effect of their substituting works for faith. They were slaves, not in the willing bonds of love to Him who

² John xvii. 2. ³ Heb. vi. 11, 12; xii. 15. ⁴ 1 John iv. 1.

had redeemed them, but to the false and impossible obligation of a yoke which they who were making merchandise of them with feigned words had persuaded them to place upon their necks. Let them now arise, and break finally that yoke, in a contrite remembrance of Him whose name and inheritance they were called by grace to share.

Verse 7. "Wherefore thou art no more a slave, but a son," &c. The change here from the plural to the singular should be noticed. The general declaration of the foregoing verse is now made the ground of a particular appeal to each believing soul. By faith we stand, and faith must grasp positively and firmly its own portion. If each member of these Galatian churches examined himself whether he were in the faith, if he proved and knew himself, he would know, if not reprobate, that Jesus Christ was in him.⁵ But if so, he is a son of the Father, in truth and love, instead of a slave of sin, in natural error and hatred of all good. He has, if a genuine believer, been raised to an entirely new standing and relationship. All natural bondage ends in death, and by faith he has already died with Christ. But he has come also to a new birth, and is, by sovereign grace, a very child of Him who by the word of His truth begets His children at His will. And his expectations are according to his birth. He is an heir as well as son, not through man or by natural generation, but through God.⁶ There is in these words an intended contrast to the pretensions of the natural Jew, who vainly magnified his hereditary relationship to Abra-

⁵ 2 Cor. xiii. 5.

⁶ Κληρονόμος διὰ Θεοῦ. This is the reading of S.V.A.

ham. The apostle shows here, and throughout his argument, that Christian faith, while incorporating the believer into the spiritual family of the father of the faithful, renders him also, by the mystery of divine regeneration, a truly begotten child of *God*. Thus what once had honour still has honour, only in a secondary sense. We are Abraham's seed in *Christ* only, and by the faith of Him.⁷ The believer is *of* God, *through* God, and *to* or *for* God. Redemption having liberated him from all his natural penalties and obligations as a sinner, he dates his new hope from Him who sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him.⁸

Let no believer, then, who reads these notes allow himself to think otherwise of the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ than as his own true Father also. The same tempter who assailed the Son of God with "ifs," but only to his own confusion,⁹ will not fail to put to a like test every member of His mystic body. Faith must be *tried*, but its trial is exceeding precious in the eyes of Him who gives it. The strength of the enemy is to remind us of what we are intrinsically, and to draw mocking inferences thence against our title by the grace of God. We repel him most effectually by admitting all his accusations, but replying that "in *Him*" in whom alone is our confidence "there is no sin."¹ To cry "Abba" is the right of all who are alive to God—of all, in other words, who fear and hate their natural selves and put their trust in Jesus Christ alone. And the deeper our spiritual distress, the more appropriate

⁷ *Ante*, chap. iii. 29.

⁸ 1 John iv. 9.

⁹ Luke iv. 34.

¹ 1 John iii. 5.

is this confiding utterance of our secret hearts to Him that searches them. From Christ's lips it came audibly to men on one occasion only, when for us guilty ones His soul was exceeding sorrowful even unto death.² Nor will it ever go up unavailingly from hearts which are emboldened to use this form of speech, in reverence and godly fear, by virtue of their faith in Him.³

Verse 8. "Howbeit then, when ye knew not God, ye did service to them which by nature are no gods." From their new and incomparable elevation as believers in the grace of God, he now turns their thoughts backwards to their natural condition as Gentiles in the flesh. In that state of darkness, of ignorance, and of spiritual death they had served a hard service once of vanity and shame. The objects of their worship were imaginary. Their gods were no gods. But the service which they rendered to these lying shadows was both real and costly. They were, like other Gentiles, "carried away to these dumb idols, even as they were led."⁴ A spirit of superstitious bondage held their souls fast to a covenant of falsehood and dishonour. Hope, they had none. For a lie can never generate true hope, nor can hope exist at all without some real and definite

² Mark xiv. 36.

³ "Crying" (*κράζον*) is, as Luther has remarked, a stronger word than "calling." It is used in Scripture to express either joyful acclamation, or distressful appeal, or passionate entreaty—in a word, strong emotional feeling of any kind. The Father is the natural resort and refuge of His children, and the ultimate depositary of their desires and their fears; and is so regarded and practically honoured by those who are led by the Spirit of His Son.

⁴ 1 Cor. xii. 2.

object to call it into life. They were governed, but not blessed. They had lords many, and gods many, but no solitary gleam of either truth, or light, or love. Such gods as they had were at best but projections of themselves, and far oftener mere idealisms of their strongest and most evil lusts. Nor was this hopeless condition of depravity without its own producing cause. The Gentiles, it is witnessed, once knew God, but willingly ignored Him, through the instinctive dislike that sin must have for holiness. Their idolatrous delusions, with the moral degradation which accompanied them, were a judicial brand of their apostacy of heart from their Creator.⁵ And this, let us remember, is essentially the state of every unconverted man. If he has not, in Christ the Son of the Father, the true God and eternal life, *he has not God at all*; though his days may be passed in sincere and laborious, though empty and utterly fallacious, exercises of religion. Ordinances and observances nominally Christian, if not really of the Spirit, are of no higher value or more beneficial effect than the ancient customs of the heathen. *It is by faith only that men live to God.* The apostle's object is to show, as appears more distinctly in what follows, that in turning to another gospel, the Galatians were resuming, under a more specious form, their previous condition of futile religiousness and hopeless spiritual debasement."

Verse 9. "But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again," &c. The self-correction contained in the earlier part of this verse is full of significance. They had known

⁵ Rom. i. 18, *seq.*

God. But could he really say as much of men, whose backs were now towards the cross and Him who had passed from it to the heavens for their sakes, and their faces turned expectingly toward the empty and God-forsaken temple of Jerusalem? Truly their knowledge of God must have been slight indeed if they could be thus early "removed from Him that called them." But if this seemed doubtful in the face of facts, he who had witnessed their earlier joy in the reception of the gospel would not permit himself to think that what originally moved them to confess the name of Jesus was a merely natural impulse on their parts. The facility with which they had yielded to the false guidance of their blinded guides might well stagger his assurance of their faith; but in the presence of human defection, like David, he seeks strength in God.⁶ He turns for comfort from the work to the Workman, from the called but fickle and unwary sheep to the unrepentant Caller of His people. That they were "known of God" was a stronger assurance to his own spirit than anything he saw, or ever had seen, on their parts. But how different is his language here from that which he addressed to the Thessalonian saints, when expressing his conviction that they are indeed elect of God!⁷ *Their* state bore outward evidence of God's otherwise inscrutable intent. Fruits shewed themselves which could have been produced only through the effectual working of His will. But on behalf of the Galatian churches, God was to be trusted in remembrance by His servant rather than distinctly recognized in their estate. Yet he not only could assure himself thus

⁶ 1 Sam. xxx. 6.⁷ 1 Thess. i. 4, *seq.*

confidently that his labour had not been in vain, but there were tokens also still visible among them which proved to his anxious spirit that, if forgetful of the voice which had first called them into the grace of Christ, they were acknowledged and remembered still of God.⁸

The question asked in the latter clause of this verse has sometimes seemed perplexing because of its appearing to imply that the Galatians had had an earlier knowledge of the law, to which they are here said to be *again* desirous to return. With an intentional emphasis the word "again" is repeated also, for the evident purpose of impressing them more deeply with a sense of their folly in departing from the living God, in favour of empty and pernicious vanities. The point of his argument is evidently this: delusions are of many forms, but all stand equally opposed to truth. They had as idolaters been in bondage to vanity, doing service to an open lie. They are now desiring to return to a system not a whit less vain and empty, albeit originally of divine institution, because vacated by fulfilment in the person of the law's great Object. Legal teaching was, as he has shown before, rudimentary and incomplete in its very nature and intention. The law made nothing perfect, least of all the conscience of the burdened worshipper. But if this be so, then legal devotedness is of no more value than ignorant idolatry. Hence the boldness and peculiar force of the apostle's words. The law can do nothing towards the justification of a sinner; for it is weak through the flesh.⁹ Help in it for a mortal there is none; for it gave, as we have

⁸ *Ante*, chap. iii. 2, 5.

⁹ Rom. viii. 3.

seen, no life, and therefore righteousness could never be by law.¹ Yet it was full of conditional promise, which left the enlightened slave of sin more wretched in his knowledge than the Gentile in his natural ignorance of God, deluding by specious but impossible conditions the self-confident, and making empty of all hope the soul that truly felt its force.² Weak and beggarly alike were those "elements," which taught men nothing truly but their own poverty and helpless guiltiness in the presence of their Judge. God only is rich, and His gospel is the pouring of His wealth, in all its lavish fulness, into the hungry bosom of an adoring faith. The Galatians had once known this, and bore witness to it in their glad reception of the truth. And should God's children and Christ's fellow-heirs desire voluntarily to descend from opulence to penury, from glory to dishonour, from hope to despair, and from holy confidence and joy to guilty restlessness and fear? For all this, and more also, is involved, as he insists, in a return to that which God has left. They make themselves transgressors if they meddle with the law.³

Verse 10. "Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years." As a proof of their disposition, he now cites an example of their practice. They were observing diligently obsolete Levitical ordinances, instead of by faith gazing, in satisfied and restful trust, on Him to whom those ordinances testified. But a question here arises, Was it then *wrong* positively, on their parts, to regard those earlier observances? The answer must undoubtedly be yes. As Gentiles who had never borne the legal yoke, they

¹ *Ante*, chap. iii. 21. ² Rom. vii. 9. ³ *Ante*, chap. ii. 18.

were both wrong and foolish to desire it; wrong, because the covenant of works was made with the circumcision only, and God now speaks no longer by His servant, but solely by His Son; and foolish because of the hideous contrast between the free grace and its resulting glory into which they had been called, and the miserable bondage to which they were ignorantly wishing to return. A believer of the circumcision might pardonably adhere to the customs of his forefathers, yet under a warning caution from the Spirit of grace;⁴ but for a converted heathen to embrace them was to manifest a fundamental ignorance of the grace in which he stood, and to dishonour the royal law of liberty by which God's lasting peace, as the fruit of His own righteousness, had been proclaimed in the gospel of salvation to his soul.

But if this be so, how far more serious is the error of those whose habit it *now* is to observe "days," &c., not on the original warranty of holy writ, but in compliance with a purely human tradition. Ecclesiastical customs differ from Levitical ordinances precisely in this all-important point, that the latter were once full of divine authority, the former never had any higher sanction than the will of man. Besides, in addition to the solemn judgment of the Lord upon the guilty character, and blinding as well as soul-hardening effect of traditional observances, as declared to us in the gospels, it is evident that the voice of the Holy Ghost in the epistle now before us must be either unheard or disregarded by those who now consent to regulate their worship and their walk as Christians by rules and institutions of a merely

⁴ Rom. xiv. 3, *seq.*

human origin. Nor is it here only that the strong dissuasives of the Spirit are addressed to God's children, when in danger of thus adding to the words of God, and clouding by carnal ordinances the lustre of His living truth.⁵

Christ, as the body and fulness of foreshadowed truth, is the only and continual festival of saints. Days, and months, and times, and years have dropped, with all other legal burdens, from the purged conscience of the true worshipper of the Father, while their *record* is a part still of God's living word, and by the grace of His revealing Spirit vacated ordinances become fresh fountains of Christ's fulness to His thirsting sheep. The waterpots of stone are full now to overflowing with the new wine of the kingdom for the heart of faith. The legal *things* are all of them *behind*, and to be left there; the truth they figured is before as ever; and a double blessing, retrospective and prospective also, results from the teachings of the Comforter, who both brings things to remembrance, and speaks to us of things to come. As they trace their Master's path of willing sorrow here below, the hearts of them that love Him are affected variously, according to the scenes through which in spirit they are passing. From the profoundest sympathetic grief and the heartiest self-loathing to the most exalted gladness and triumphant exultation of spirit, the redeemed of God both may and must pass through all the intermediate moods of experimental consciousness, as they learn the things of Christ under the sure teaching of Him who alone has power to show them to our souls.

⁵. Col. ii. 16 *ad. fin.* Hebrews *passim*.

But an outward observance of times and seasons belongs not to those who worship God in the Spirit, as themselves already by faith risen with Christ, and therefore no longer in the flesh. Viewed in this light, the life which we now live in the flesh is a seven days' feast of unleavened bread; Christ, our passover, having been sacrificed for us, our present calling is to keep the feast; feeding now in spirit on the living Bread, and watchfully endeavouring to shun all forms of evil in communion with Him whose love is our life and hope. The shadowy ordinances have fled into oblivion before the bright shining of the living Truth. "The body is of Christ."⁶ From Him, and not from Moses, they who are His house receive the law of their behaviour and the ordinances of their worship. He has given them a new commandment, which they keep only who abide in Him.⁷ He has charged us with a service of remembrance whose demand upon our conscience is forgotten in the weight of its appeal to our hearts.⁸ The teacher of formalism is the spirit of error and of bondage, not of truth and grace. And if it should be asked, may not a Christian voluntarily hallow and observe those seasons and events in the life of our Lord that correspond historically with the typical observances which shadowed them before, it would ill become any who hold in due reverence the emotional longings of true piety to deny peremptorily such a form of spiritual liberty. If all other things are lawful, though not all expedient, surely this may be held in some cases both lawful and expedient. For whatever is done by believers at the dictate of

⁶ Col. ii. 17.⁷ John xv. 12.⁸ 1 Cor. xi. 24, 25.

their love to Christ has intrinsic value in His eyes, and should have also in the eyes of all who have His mind. But to impose such observances on Christians as things *necessary* is to repeat, with far less excuse, the sin of those who laboured to bring the Churches of Galatia under the legal yoke. It should be well remembered also that spiritual sentiment, though claiming always Christian sympathy, affords no solid ground for faith to walk on. It is moreover in its nature adverse to true edification, if indulged without due regard to the positive teachings of the Spirit in the written word. For although believers are not under the law, but under grace, *obedience* is the virtue most esteemed of God in the children whom He calls His own. *His will*, and not their own religious feeling, is their proper guide, and an unrequired yet fixed and formal habit of observance is, in the nature of it, "will-worship" rather than the genuine work of faith.

Verse 11. "I am afraid of you," &c. Such was his sorrowful impression from what he heard of their new-born zeal for law. Judged by their present ways, he failed to see in them the spot of God's true children; for there seemed to be, on their part, a failing of the grace of God.⁹ Christ was nowhere visible in the services in which they took their chief delight. They were looking backward to the things of earth, instead of setting their affections upon things above. His former confidence was changed to fear and disappointment. For he had wrought them, as he trusted, for the Lord, and they were no longer walking in His light. We may

⁹ Heb. xii. 15.

compare his present language with his earlier question to themselves.¹ Had he then toiled for them, and spent on them the labour of his love, with no better result than to render them an easy prey to the deceiver? Such a thought was insupportable, yet what hopeful inferences could be drawn from what he then beheld? Alarm, both on his and their account, was the form his love took as he pondered, while thus personally absent from them, their altered state and feeling both towards the gospel and himself. But a true love cannot content itself with negative expressions. The very confession of his apprehension excites in him a yet more earnest zeal on their behalf.

Verse 12. "Be ye as I, for I am as ye, brethren, I beseech you." There is an inimitable beauty in this verse.² His language had been that of angry astonishment and injured love, as he upbraided them for deserting and being ashamed of him and of his doctrine at the persuasion of the stranger and destroyer. But reproach, though welcome to the truly wise,³ has too often upon flesh and blood an alienating effect. The blamer stands, or seems to stand, upon a different and higher platform than the blamed. None understood this better than the apostle, who now, without revoking his sharp words, essays to pour into the wounds which they had made the healing balm of a thorough and entire sympathy. He will have them understand that, in anything he addressed to them, he spoke not as a stranger, but

¹ *Ante*, chap. iii. 6.

² Our translators have, by inverting the order of the apostle's words, impaired in some degree the force of this appeal.

³ Prov. xvii. 10.

as one rather of themselves. He, Paul, though by birth 'a Hebrew of the Hebrews,' had been 'without law' to them, yet they might judge if in anywise he had been inferior in respect of holy conversation and godliness to those who had attempted to supplant him in their hearts. They had known, and once acknowledged him, as a man who spoke to them the words of God, and made them acquainted with His ways. If circumcision, then, was a thing so necessary to their spiritual well-being, why did he not preach it to them from the first? Let them awake only from their present hallucination, and they would be again found by his side. For he, as they, stood debtor solely to the grace of Christ. By lending their ears to the perverters of His gospel they had wronged, not the apostle who had brought to them God's message of glad tidings, but themselves. So far from doing him injustice, their defection, though in a sad and most unwelcome manner, redounded truly to his personal honour. For by their dereliction of the true grace of God, which Paul had taught them, they did but bring into a much fuller light the real character and glory of his ministry. They indeed had fallen, but he had stood fast in the faith, grasping more firmly than ever the banner which was slipping from their hands.⁴ They were no longer as he was, though he had continued as they once had been. Their glory was departed, or at least was under an eclipse, while he was ever full of its accustomed brightness; for he gloried only in the Lord. Full of this double consciousness, both of the joy unspeakable of standing fast in Christ, and of the fatal con-

⁴ Psalm xx. 5; lx. 4.

sequences which must follow a final and deliberate turning back from light to darkness, he entreats them for their own sakes and for his.

Verses 13, 14. "Ye know how through infirmity of the flesh I preached the gospel unto you at the first," &c. If they duly recollected their own origin as Christians, they would feel constrained to side with him against their later selves. For how had he appeared among them when he first came as an ambassador of Christ? Was it to speak either of himself or them? Was there either in his doctrine or his personal presence and condition anything to suggest, much less enforce, distinctions between flesh and flesh? He preached to them *God's gospel*; while, as respected his own presence and manner, he was to them, as he was also to the Corinthians, a spectacle of personal weakness fitted rather to excite contempt than admiration.⁵ But then they had thought only of his words, which fell like the dew of God upon their souls, as he spake to them of things which neither heart nor mind of man had ever entertained. Their natural temptation⁶ to slight and disregard his testimony, on the ground of his external insignificance and unattractiveness, was forgotten in their rapture at his message. For none, until Paul came, had ever

⁵ *Conf.* 1 Cor. ii. 3; 2 Cor. x. 10. Various speculations are entertained respecting the "infirmity of the flesh" here mentioned. The suggestion that it means only that he was out of health seems hardly on a level with the subject which he has in hand. It is more reasonable to refer it to that supernatural infirmity which he found so hard to bear, but in which he could yet glory, in communion with the grace and wisdom which ordained it both for his and our sakes. (2 Cor. xii. 7-10.)

⁶ S.V.A. read "your temptation in my flesh." The difference is morally of little weight.

told them of such things. To hear of the living and true God, and of the grace of that just and holy One, who knew sinners thoroughly—for He knew what was in man, but knew them not to hate them, but in love to give Himself to death for their redemption—was then enough to hold and carry their whole souls. Contempt and rejection doubtless befell God's message and His messenger in the region of Galatia, as elsewhere; but they whom he now addressed had, through grace, received the word with joy. And that word was so complete in its declaration of the kindness and love of God to man that they could only think and speak of "blessedness," as often as they thought and spoke of what they had received from Paul. And their entertainment of himself was according to their estimation of his work. They welcomed him as God's own messenger; nay, they received in heart the Lord Himself, in the person of His ambassador, and honoured him according to the excellency of that name.

Verse 15. "Where is then the blessedness ye spake of?" &c. What was then this blessedness of which their hearts and lips were once so full? Assuredly the same as that which David had before described.⁷ Now David spake by the Spirit, when he set forth, in inspired strains, the joy of a forgiven and divinely justified transgressor. And so also had these Galatians, when, with a grateful and exultant gladness they gave utterance to the peace and happiness which filled their hearts, as the effect of the righteousness which Paul had preached. With an anxious astonishment at their changed condition, he

⁷ Rom. iv. 6, *seq.*

seeks now to recall also to their minds his own vivid memories of those fresh and joyous days of their first love. Had they clean forgotten those lively and intense emotions; and if so, what was it that had effaced them so quickly from their recollection, and by what were they supplanted in their minds? Let them consider and compare honestly their former and their actual state. It was not for *him* at least to forget the enthusiastic demonstrations of their love. But what was it that produced these? And if "blessedness" was no more on their tongues, and strife and contentious emulations, instead of mutual congratulation and affection, were now their sad distinction, to what was this untoward transformation owing? Whither had their gladness fled, and why? Surely an answer was ready in their hearts, if what he had thus far written had not been in vain. The cause was but too apparent. They had exchanged God for man in turning back from grace to law, and with the natural consequences. Love is of God, and lasts only with our knowledge and enjoyment of Himself. In other words, faith only can either produce it or maintain it. And the law is not of faith. The law-seeking Galatians were increasing consequently, not in the knowledge of God, but of themselves only, and that after a most dreary sort. Of blessedness they spoke no longer, because the dew of God's blessing was no longer on their souls. Without faith it is impossible to please Him, and with God displeased both joy and peace must have an end.

As to the strong and peculiar language of the apostle's testimony, it agrees with the highly de-

monstrative and excitable character of the Gaulish race. There may or there may not be in it an allusion to ophthalmic disease, as a feature of the "infirmity of the flesh" to which he had referred. As a strong expression of gratitude and personal attachment it has parallels in ordinary speech. The ebullitions of genuine emotion are seldom confined in their utterance to literal truth; and the more constitutionally eager the temperament of the speaker, the more widely extravagant will be the speech.

Verse 16. "Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?" Reaction is often not less swift than impulse in minds not firmly founded in the truth of God,^s and every departure from sound doctrine works a double wrong. The new teaching, both from its novelty and because of its natural adaptation to the flesh, overrules, if it does not eradicate, the old; while the mind that has strayed is indisposed to own its error, and as it were proclaim itself a fool by again changing to its former views. Faithful indeed are the wounds of a friend, but their sharpness has commonly, at first, an alienating effect, to be subdued only by a reflective comparison of the earlier and later persuasions which have held in their turn the mastery of the soul. Paul had twice dealt truly with those whom he thus questions: once when, as an ambassador of Christ, he first brought to their thirsting ears the words of life eternal, and now, when rejoicing alone in what had been their common joy, he proves his love by the anxiety with which he endeavours to recall them to their former selves. To effect this he is even ready

^s For a memorable instance of this see Acts xiv. 11-19.

for a season to incur their enmity, if only his words may eventually do their work.

Verse 17. "They zealously affect you, but not well," &c. The true character and habit of carnal sectarianism, as opposed to the obedience of faith, is forcibly depicted in this verse. A false zeal seeks proselytes to an idea or a creed; a true zeal lives on, and commends by word and deed, the grace and truth which came by Jesus Christ. The one appeals always, though under manifold deceptive forms, to self-interest or self-love; the other hides the creature in the shadow of its Maker, and allows itself no other aim than God. His words both feed and animate a genuine zeal, and He is Himself, as now revealed in the person and gospel of His Son, both the measure and reason of His children's walk. Themselves nothing, because Christ is all, they cannot be sectarian, because *their* party is the *Lord's*. With either embracing or rejecting they have nothing, on their own accounts, to do. The souls which they wisely win they win for Christ; and find their joy fulfilled when any, through their means, become true and consistent confessors of His cross. Beyond this they can entertain no second thought, for that He should be known and honoured is their only care. Tactics they have none, save those by which love turns its opportunities to best account in the spirit of a self-denying grace. Sincerity is the character of a true faith always, and its aims and methods are as transparent, to an eye practised to distinguish good from evil, as its end is pure.

But sectarian bigotry is the sad reverse of this. Basing itself on spiritual pride, it emphatically, and

by many a tortuous method, seeks *its own*. Instead of caring for the sheep by faithfully putting them in mind of the true Shepherd and His love, and enforcing His moral claims upon the heart and conscience by an unremitting ministration of His grace, its appeal is to the natural fears and passions of its dupes. Men of this sort affect an exclusiveness of standing or privilege, or it may be an extraordinary fidelity to truth commonly believed—for many indeed are the possible phases of Pharisaic pride, as a mere lure to the ignorant and unwary. Themselves blinded by their own delusions, and by good words and fair speeches deceiving the hearts of the simple,⁹ they encircle themselves with a barrier of falsehood which a sound faith shuns as a deceitful quicksand, but which thoughtless ignorance or self-seeking pietism, or timid instability, may long to pass for the sake of the supposed treasure which it hides. The spirit here exposed by the apostle finds its representatives in the most widely sundered forms and associations. Priestcraft or clerisy, as opposed to true spiritual ministry, has not only its desolate and time-dishonoured historic monuments, but, as an active principle of falsehood, may be found bearing its own evil fruits wherever influence or authority of a merely human kind attempts to regulate the faith or practice of the Church of God.¹ Flattery and intimidation are used

⁹ Rom. xvi. 18.

¹ Let none mistake my words. They are aimed, not at particular offices or institutions, but at the spirit which leads men in Christ's name to domineer instead of serve; to lord it over God's heritage, instead of being examples of His patience to the flock, and, for the love of Him who bought them, feeding faithfully Christ's sheep and lambs. (John xxi. 15-17.)

with equal freedom and readiness, as instruments for the attainment of objects worthy of such means. Honest infatuation sometimes labours in this cause, but oftener, by the testimony of Him who knows what is in man—*hypocrisy*. Name and place, and power and credit among men, are the prizes of sectarian effort, to the neglect of that honour which comes from God only, and which awaits, at the end of their earthly course, as many as for Christ's name sake truly suffered His reproach.

Verse 18. "But it is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing, and not only when I am present with you." From the false and evil earnestness of their deceivers, he now turns to speak of that which he had once welcomed and honoured in themselves as a zeal according to knowledge, and which both loved and followed after good.² To be thus minded was their honour, but to slacken in this race, and still more to deviate into other and strange ways, was not honour, but dishonour. It was fraught moreover with both loss and danger to themselves, as confessors of the name of Jesus Christ; and he would fain arouse them to a thorough consciousness of this. Let them ask themselves the reason of their former zeal, and compare it with the motives which had latterly been ruling them. Had Paul only been the spring and stay of their devotedness? Had truth changed with his departure from Galatia, and a different gospel, with another saviour, superseded that

² The point of contrast in this and the preceding verse is in the words *οὐ καλῶς* and *καλόν*. Dishonour was in the ways of the false zealots. The Galatian Churches had begun in honour, but were tending, under the false guidance of the former, to dishonour.

which they had once so eagerly received? Was their faith in God so weak that they could walk as Christians in the presence only of their human teacher? And yet while absent in body, he was in spirit and desire with them still, though they had lost, in the new and false love of their delusions, their affectionate remembrance of him.

Verse 19. "My little children,³ of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you." These are strong and strange words to be addressed to really Christian ears, yet not inconsistent with his former recognition of them as believers. He has already reminded them of their filial relationship in Christ to God; he now interposes between their new teachers and themselves his decisive claim, as their spiritual father in the gospel, to their obedient regards. They had not many such;⁴ and if they asked their hearts they would find that it was better with them while they honoured him, by cleaving to his words, than since they had followed their strange guides. He was their father in the faith of Christ, and felt towards them as a father should; while his disappointment, as he saw them carried away by divers and strange doctrines, caused him to suffer in his spirit more than a mother's pangs on their account. For if they continued as they were their hope was gone. Already they were in a state which laid upon his love a second time the burden of travailing for their salvation. He had done this once, when first he preached the word of life among them. He had then by the grace of God

³ It may be noticed that this tender appellative, so frequent in the letters of "the Elder," occurs here only in the writings of Paul.

⁴ 1 Cor. iv. 15.

converted them from Gentile ignorance. He has now to toil for their deliverance from Jewish pride and spiritual self-complacency ; and their latter state was worse and more perilous than the first, since with a name to live they were lying still among the dead. For Christ has no place, nor can have, in a heart which goes about to establish its own righteousness. Paul's anxiety is not that they should believe upon the name of Christ, but that He should be formed in them. They had once believed, and even as legalists they were confessing still, though wrongly, the name of Jesus Christ ; but what was *in* them, and came therefore out of them, while thus minded, was not Christ, but their own deluded selves. So long as Christ was dwelling in their hearts by faith they spake of blessedness ; and if that speech had died upon their lips, it was because the truth which gave it life and meaning no longer had the mastery of their hearts. They were drawing back ; and that it might not be unto perdition, he plants himself thus earnestly and passionately to withstand them in the retrograde path which they are now so desirous to take.

Verse 20. "I desire⁵ to be present with you now, and to change my voice ; for I stand in doubt of you." To be present with them had once been his comfort and his joy ; but if now he longed to see them, it was to give free vent to the indignation and sorrowing anxiety which oppressed his heart. If among them he could not speak to them as formerly, he would change his voice from praise to blame, from encouragement to grave expostulation, and from

⁵ ἡθέλω, "I could wish."

affectionate entreaty to prophetic warning. At least, if he revisited them, he must preach to them a second time the Gospel which they had let slip. They had transformed themselves from saints into sinners in his absence, and he must address them, therefore, as they were. His confidence had been rudely shaken by the tidings he had heard of their defection; but he was their father still, and would not easily believe that they were gone irrecoverably from the faith. Yet he was perplexed as well as grieved, not knowing how much to credit of the evil which he heard. Were he present, he would know better how to judge their case, and to temper the remedy which he desired to apply. Enough, however, of the nature of their error was known to enable him to write with a firm pen this inimitable treatise on the rudimental variance of law and grace. We, on our parts, have to bless God that he was led to write it under the circumstances in which he was. The passionate earnestness of his style not only gives a value of its own to what he thus delivers, but remains as an example also, to all times, of the sort of emotions which should be excited in the hearts of God's true servants, whenever called to witness and deal with, in their day, any similar spectacle of departure from the simplicity of Christ. We take things easily in our day of feeble faith and strong humanitarian sentiment, but we shall do well to cultivate more sedulously the spirit which animated the apostle. He loved the Galatians earnestly, but with a pure, and therefore an unyielding, love; for he loved them *in the Lord*. His heart was Christ's, and his jealousy was for the truth of the Gospel and the

glory of His name. And if his words were sharp to those whom he addressed, it was because he knew the inseparable connexion of their own true blessing and the faith for which he so persistently and earnestly contends.

Verses 21-23. "Tell me, ye that desire to be under law, do ye not hear the law?" &c. The grave and dangerous character of their backsliding from the truth has been already more than convincingly shown. But he has another witness in reserve, whom he now proceeds to bring forward, in order to complete their confusion, and put a final stop to all further legal questionings or inclinations on their parts. By the law's own mouth he will convince them of their folly in desiring to assume its yoke. If they listened they would find in its testimony a reproof of instruction to restore them to the way of life.⁶ It is noticeable that here, as often elsewhere,⁷ "the law" carries the meaning of the Old Testament generally. From the tenor of the question here put, there is room for the supposition that their unwise desire may have been imparted to him by some among themselves, who, like the Corinthian saints, may have laid their wishes and the reason of them before him by letter.⁸ Be this as it may, he turns now to Moses's inspired account of the origin of Abraham's double family, with the intention of demonstrating, from a new point of view, the real nature of their error. The foundation of the apostle's reasoning in this passage

⁶ Prov. vi. 23.

⁷ *e. g.*, 1 Cor. xiv. 21. Whatever came from Moses had this name as distinguished from "the prophets." But in Rom. iii. 19 both together are thus designated in comparison with the present testimony of the Spirit.

⁸ Compare 1 Cor. vii. 1.

is the principle of Jewish law by which the child followed the social condition of its mother. Now the Galatians were, if believers, Abraham's true seed. But Abraham had two sons, and of diverse generation. Their mothers were not equal in their social state; the one being bond, the other free; the first Abraham's slave, the last, his wedded wife. But, besides this, the children differed also *essentially* from each other, and did not derive their being from the same producing cause. The elder was of merely natural birth; the younger came miraculously, and against the order of nature. The son of the free-woman was *by promise*. The heir must be according to his heritage; equally, and immediately, *of God*, and in the way of sovereign good pleasure and supernatural grace. The heritage was contained in the promissory declaration "I will *bleſs*." The heir was assured to his progenitor in the further promise "I will *come*." And now, having recalled to their minds these Scriptural facts, he proceeds, in what follows, to apply them in such a manner as by an inspired exposition of their spiritual force to show to his children in the faith a clear way of escape from the entanglements of Jewish sophistry, with a view to their effectual re-establishment upon the firm footing of elective grace.⁹

Verse 24. "Which things are an allegory," &c. The *principle* on which the apostle here allegorizes, or applies to other objects earlier historical facts, is very

⁹ It has been not unreasonably suggested that the cast of the latter part of this chapter is due to the allegorizing habits of the Rabbinical teachers, whom the apostle would answer according to their folly, by framing a genuine and divinely-authorized allegory in illustration of the true doctrine of the Gospel.

simple. The Scriptures are *the Word of God*. Their subject, therefore, first and last, is God in His varied relationships to man. The persons of Scripture are representative persons, each one exemplifying some doctrine or principle of good or evil, truth or falsehood, &c. Hence *all* Scripture is, in this sense, typical; and inasmuch as Christ is personally the truth, the whole of the Old Testament is to the believer a cyphered Gospel, to which the Spirit of wisdom and revelation offers him the key. The preservative from the danger of a misapplication on our parts of what was written aforetime is, first, a cautious abstinence from any attempt to *originate*, as an inspired writer has here done, any doctrinal argument from an earlier historical instance; and, secondly, to keep rigidly within the limits of declared apostolic teaching in our endeavours to evoke a Christian sense from the ancient Jewish Scriptures. Because these Scriptures are the "oracles of God," we are sure of finding Christ in them, if only we desire in a right spirit the sincere milk of the Word. But it should never be forgotten that an application of Scripture is not the same thing as its final interpretation; and that all the words of God are pure, and will have, at their appointed season, a strict and literal fulfilment. As himself, through grace, a "partaker of Christ," the believer has an interest, both immediate and remote, in the whole compass of those Scriptures which are now distinctively "the Word of Christ."¹

Turning now to the case before us, the two women represent the two covenants; or, in other words, they

¹ Col. iii. 16.

personify respectively the opposing principles of law and grace. And here we should note an inversion of the previous order. In the chapter immediately preceding he had demonstrated and insisted on the the priority of grace to law, and the necessary subservience of the latter to the former, by an appeal to the Abrahamic promise. He now, in describing the operative fulfilment and effects of promise, sets the law first, as the pre-ordained occasion of effective grace. Again, the woman whom Abram took at the suggestion of natural impatience and infirmity of faith, but whom God did not *give*, and would not acknowledge as the fitting channel of His promised blessing, is first noticed. But her individuality is forgotten, and she receives her historic monument in the mountain where the children of Abraham after the flesh consented, in the blindness of their hearts, to a proposal which, if accepted, could have no other effect than to postpone indefinitely the fulfilment of their proper hope, and to bring them meanwhile under a yoke of bondage which they could not bear.

Verse 25. "For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia," &c. The woman whom Sarai gave to Abraham was an Egyptian. Her progeny were Arabians by country, Hagarenes by natural descent; true figure both of the pride and unavailing restlessness of unregenerate man, as an alien from the way of peace, and going about in vain to establish his own righteousness. Their land was not God's land of promise, nor were they themselves the seed of God. As their patrimony they received a self-willed immunity from the restraint of ordered government, with its natural accompaniment, the hostility of all

other races to their own. The waste and barren land which they inhabited was worthy of the moral conditions of their destiny. No flowings there of either milk or honey, no settled habitation, and no rest. When Jehovah gave the law of works to Israel He chose as the appropriate theatre of that event the wilderness of Sinai. Food never came to mortal man from law, nor peace, nor joy, nor any other good, and with its promulgation liberty was at an end. Its righteous enactment became a hopeless fetter for a sinful nation, and God was by it severed from the people whom He had chosen for the fathers' sakes, and had borne, in covenanted mercy, to Himself on eagles' wings.

The bold language of the apostle, while its true justification is the divine authority by which he wrote, is sustained not only by its own allegoric fitness, but by a topographical fact also, which probably was not unknown to those whom he addressed. Agar was Sinai, and Sinai was Agar, in the language of the native descendants of the original bond-woman, and this perpetuation and localizing of her name affords a just foundation for the parallel, which he has here drawn, between the mount which might be touched and the city of solemnities, whose bondage and widowhood were fruits of her fatal preference of law to grace. The Galatians should have known that Jerusalem, the holy city where for awhile Jehovah had His throne, was not only in a state of shameful subjection to the will of Gentile pride, but under a yet heavier bondage to that curse of the violated law beneath which she had of late freshly bound herself by her blind rejection of her Saviour, and from which

a true faith in His cross alone sets free. Her doom was settled and pronounced by Him whom she had haughtily refused, and in her guilty ignorance had crucified and slain; and she was presently, like her Egyptian prototype, to be cast forth from the habitation of her pride, and sent to wander, with her children, a judicial outcast through the wilderness of the Gentiles. The Lord who once chose her, and will choose her yet again, had sealed her rejection openly when He turned from the temple, which they still called by His name, to reveal His presence, and the glory of His power, in the midst of those who confessed and suffered for the Name which the nation, and its rulers still abhorred. The law had been given, had wrought its work, and was visible in its effects. By its means a conditional blessing had become a fixed and unrelenting curse. Both misery and degradation filled the cup of a people which thought still of Moses as their teacher, and vainly waited in their blindness for the coming of Him who was already come, and whom they had driven back, in the infatuation of their own self-righteous madness, to the glory which in His love to them and to ourselves He left for a season, that He might visit and bear the burdens of His own.² But it was not of Jerusalem on earth that Paul had spoken when he brought to these forgetful Galatians the glad tidings of salvation. And of this he reminds them in what follows.

Verse 26. "But Jerusalem above, which is our

² Psalm lxxx. 17. In the mystery of redemption their own act has prepared and realized the condition of their future deliverance. Jesus—as now expecting at the right hand of Jehovah—will be the answer, at the time appointed, to this prophetic appeal of Zion's outcasts.

mother,³ is free." This verse is of peculiar interest; not only because we have here, for the first time, the name Jerusalem connected not with earth but with heaven, but also because of its distinct assertion of a *locality* towards which Christian faith may look, as Israel looked, and with failing eyes still looks, toward the city where Jehovah had His house and name. At the close of the third chapter he had introduced the Galatian believers into Abraham's family under a new and paramount title, by declaring their union with Abraham's true seed. In like manner he now confers on them the freedom of the city of the true David, and realizes for them, only in a far higher sense, the blessings of that citizenship to which the natural Jew continued to assert his vain and barren claim. That we "are come to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem," is already a part of the believer's boast. They who are born of God by the power of His gospel, are fellow-citizens with the saints and of the household of God. They are citizens of the city which God has prepared for them that pleased Him here below; for which Abraham looked, and into which by faith the Spirit now brings all who in and through Jesus Christ go up as worshippers to God. The earthly Jerusalem, while her desolation lasts, is known by other and far different names. "Sodom and Egypt" are the reproachful designations by which the place where our Lord was crucified is now known to the Spirit, who calls us to look straight up to heaven for our home, and makes us know that we have no continuing city here. Jerusalem above is free, for she is both new

³ The word "all" is generally allowed to be spurious.

and holy. Bondage is a fruit of sin, but she is founded on eternal righteousness, yet with a retrospective and triumphant reference to sin. For He who laid her foundations is the *Redeemer* of Abraham His friend. She is the habitation of God and of the Lamb; having the glory of God, and full of the life which is the light of men.⁴ She is the city of the greater king than Solomon, of the Son of God who makes His people free. God's children are children of light, and have their dwelling where He dwells. The glory, honour, and immortality, which are found in that abode, are sought by those who now receive with meekness the engrafted word. No law of restraint can there have any place, since there is nothing to restrain where sin has neither name nor remembrance, and only truth and love are found.

Verse 27. "For it is written, Rejoice thou barren that bearest not," &c. In considering this quotation we should bear in mind the Apostle's earlier words.⁵ The promise made to Abraham was a prophetic gospel to the Gentiles. The word spoken by Isaiah is of no less breadth and fulness. Positive and definite, as a promise to the long-afflicted earthly city, it is conceived in terms which suit not less perfectly the intermediate calling and blessing of the Church. Three things are here affirmed as applicable to the heavenly Jerusalem previously to the present dispensation of the Spirit. She is described as "barren," as "not travailing," and as "desolate." Each of these conditions is fulfilled in the history and actual situation of the city where the Son of

⁴ Rev. xxi. 2, 11, 23.

⁵ *Ante*, chap. iii. 8.

Jesse dwelt; and to the restoration of her that was forsaken, in the day when the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and purge away iniquity from Jacob, the prophet's words relate unquestionably in their primary and natural interpretation. It is by an allegorical or typical application only of these words that their relation to Jerusalem above can be perceived. For literally and positively it cannot be affirmed that the latter was ever forsaken of her Maker, or left desolate by Him who has His dwelling there; nor could the pleasure of the living God be ever barren of result, nor His counsel prove inoperative or without effect. What the Apostle is thus describing is the manifestation of that counsel in the mystery of the Church of His election, by means of the heavenly calling of his gospel.

Considered in this light, the heavenly Jerusalem was "barren" while Jehovah lingered at the earthly habitation of His glory. The promise made to Abraham, and confirmed in Christ, bore no apparent fruit until the Holy Ghost came down from heaven, to publish with a new aim and purpose the name of Him whom the rulers of Jerusalem had disallowed, and thus lay openly the foundation of the true and living temple of Jehovah's glory. She did not "travail" till her time was come. As Rachel died in giving birth to Benjamin, the birth-throes of the new Jerusalem may be said to have come upon her, when by means of death the One just heir of promise became the fruitful beginning of the generation of the sons of God. For such language is, in any case, but a sympathetic reflection of that lonely and incommunicable agony which lay upon the Son of God when He bore,

in the hopeful travail of His soul, the pains of our redemption. The travail of Jerusalem above was expressed also by the sorrow of the chosen few, to whose wondering and bewildered minds the Lord declared the mystery of His impending departure to the Father.⁶ A sword moreover pierced the heart of her that bare Him when the blessed among women saw Immanuel die. But this sorrow is no more remembered in the new and everlasting joy that the true Man has been born into the world. Again, when Jesus left with tears the earthly city desolate, the time was close at hand for the open transference to Jerusalem above of her maternal joys. There is joy now in heaven, but mourning in Immanuel's forsaken land below. For He has left for a season that part of His inheritance, to take possession of a higher seat than that of David. Set now upon the throne of the eternal Father, He acknowledges and brings forth and offers to His blessing, as the true Joseph,⁷ the children whom the Father gave to Him. Lastly, the children of the desolate are many more than those of her that had the husband. Many are the seed of bondage, but far more that aggregate of spiritual increase, which no man can number, of those who from every tongue and nation will surround the throne of grace. They who once were aliens from the covenants of promise and without God in the world are now, by the fulfilling of divine election, become the children of the living God. The sand of the sea-shore will be a just comparison of increase on the day when Israel shall blossom and bud and fill the face of the world with fruit. Mean-

⁶ John xvi. 6, 21, 22.

⁷ Gen. xlviii. 8, *seq.*

while the stars of heaven, whose names and number are known only to their Maker,⁸ are the witnessing pattern of the multitude and glory of the saints in light.

Verse 28. "Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise." Returning now from his allegoric expansion of the personal type, he makes no mention indeed of Sarah, but proceeds to speak of the original child of promise for the purpose of asserting the equality and common origin of believers as heirs of elective grace. We are children of promise, he says, "after the manner of Isaac."⁹ Miraculous was the origin of the long-deferred heir of Abraham; and not less so is the generation of each child of God. Flesh and blood have no part in the kingdom of God, nor are the children of promise born after the will or by the power of men. Let us note here also the confident tone of his assertion, in comparison with the earlier expression of his doubt. Love hopeth all things, and will not easily think such evil of its neighbour as is implied in a willing departure from the faith. These deceived Galatians are "brethren" still, and if so, their mother is not Sinai but Jerusalem above. He will not think them bastards, but true sons of God by faith in Jesus Christ.

Verse 29. "But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so is it now." With identity of birthright there is a parity of fortune likewise, both now and in the world to come. Faith and patience are not separable, and God's friends must be the enemies of a world that loves not God. This verse is of much interest

⁸ Psalm cxlvii. 4.

⁹ Κατὰ Ἰσαάκ.

and importance as exemplifying the intrinsic and irreconcilable contrariety of the old nature to the new—the former ever hating and persecuting the latter, at the impulse of a will in total insubjection to the will of God. This principle of hostility may be illustrated in the smallest not less than in the greatest instances. A child's mocking laugh is, in the estimation of the heart-searching Spirit of truth, as real a token of a persecuting hatred as the bloody death of a prophet or apostle of the faith. Ishmael mocked Isaac, and the banded authorities of this world mocked and pitilessly persecuted to the death the true Heir and First-born of the whole family of God.¹

It is well also that the thoughtful reader should consider and remember carefully that the "now" of this verse extends to the full measure of the dispensation of divine long-suffering. From the outset of His ministry the Lord accustomed His disciples' ears to prophetic warnings from His lips respecting the afflictions of the Gospel; and it is among the latest of the Spirit's testimonies that the true follower of Jesus shall partake his Master's cup. Let none therefore be deceived by the treacherous immunity which is accorded at present to the namers of the name of Christ. It is due chiefly to two causes; first, the engrossing activity of the age in the pursuit of its own material objects; and, secondly, the wofully low tone and condition of the much-divided and dishonoured Church. The light which the world hates is *Christ*, but a divided church is no true epistle of Christ. So also as it respects individual saints. What provokes con-

¹ 2 Tim. iii. 12.

tempt and persecution on the part of them that know not God is not profession, but reality. The wrath of him who rules the darkness of this age is excited, not by sound opinions, but by a living obedience to the truth and adorning of the doctrine of our Saviour God. Christians are safe from persecution so long as they pursue, as philanthropists or social reformers, common objects with the world. The believer who is found on the same platform as the unbeliever is despised by the latter for his inconsistency, but unmolested in consideration of his usefulness. None ever cleave to the Lord with true and undivided purpose of heart without forfeiting the friendship of the world.

Verse 30. "Nevertheless, what saith the scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son," &c. The voice of Sarah, and her natural maternal anger, is here lost in the louder and more solemn tones of the Spirit by which she spake. Mark, too, the apostle's form of speech. The *scripture*, which foresaw and preached to Abraham the blessings of free grace, pronounces also, by the lips of Sarah, the sentence of disherison and exclusion on the unregenerate namer of the name of Christ. "The servant abideth not in the house for ever: but the Son abideth ever,"² was the declaration of the true Isaac, as He maintained the cause of righteousness against the self-deluded slaves of sin and death. And here let those who love and live upon His words take also from the lips of their ever-blessed Master the comforting assurance of their own part in the inheritance among the brethren.³

² John viii. 35.

³ Prov. xvii. 2; 2 Tim. iii. 15; John xii. 26.

"Cast out," is the peremptory command of justice, when it balances the claims of nature to the promises of God. "I will in no wise cast out," is the unalterable word of Him who still waits to be gracious in the abundance of His freely-loving mercy, to all that come by faith to Him.⁴ The true heir is the sincere and self-judging believer; the prospective outcast is the self-reliant truster in himself or his religious views. The ultimate decision of the long-pending controversy between flesh and Spirit will be at the revelation of that Judge who already stands before the door. Meanwhile power for mischief is in the hands of the bondwoman and her seed. Grace suffers, with its Lord, while nature mocks its hopes and contradicts its claims. They who are of faith and promise have need of patience also till the hour of possession come. Present ease belongs to the carnal and self-satisfied professor, who feeds now without fear, but also without faith, and therefore with no true enjoyment, upon the children's bread. For he is at home in natural things and outward forms, and a stranger only where faith has its rest. Ishmael is older and stronger than Isaac till the day of weaning comes, and the milk of the word of grace on which faith lives is exchanged for the visible realization of the long-treasured inheritance of the saints in light.⁵

Verse. 31. "So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free." Having stated thus fully and conclusively the distinction between law and grace, flesh and spirit, bond and free, the apostle ends his demonstrative argument by reaffirming, on his own behalf and theirs, a positive interest

⁴ John vi. 37.

⁵ Gen. xxi. 8; 1 Peter i. 4.

in the better part. Both characters they cannot truthfully sustain together. Both he and they had been alike, though in different senses, bondmen ; and through the same sovereign grace had been made free children of Jerusalem above. Debtors no longer to the flesh, to live after the flesh, their common calling is to walk by faith and not by sight. With the filial title they have also the Father's sure and rich provision for the way, until the Hope they wait for meets and welcomes them to endless rest.

CHAPTER V.

VERSE 1. "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ made us free,"¹ &c. Exhortation naturally follows doctrine. Presuming therefore on their acceptance of his corrective teaching in the foregoing chapters, the apostle now exhorts his recovered brethren to a renewed boldness and constancy in the assertion and maintenance of their standing in the true grace of God. Under the delusive guidance of the legalists, they had forgotten their true character, and in their infatuation had begun to speak and think as servants, not as sons. But their calling into the grace of Christ was of a different kind. We are changed, if truly in the faith of God's elect, from darkness to light, from sin to righteousness, from bondage to liberty, and from death to life. The act of our emancipation must not be confounded with our own perception and consequent enjoyment of it. The latter dates from and continues with our *faith*; the former was achieved when our once dead Deliverer revived. Christ made His people free when He shook off in person the fetters of the grave, and became the first-fruits of the resurrection unto life. His endurance of the curse was their exemption from the same; His blood-shedding was for the remission of their sins, but their *ransom* is *Himself*.

¹ S.V.A. read: "It is for liberty that Christ made us free; stand fast therefore," &c.

Returning from His sacrificial bondage to both sin and death into the native liberty of His own unspotted and eternal righteousness, He thus brings forth His captives out of their prison-house, and settles them in the quiet resting-places of salvation. For He is Himself the life of His redeemed, and as their Forerunner He has entered into heaven itself, there to appear in the presence of God for them. The Son has returned to the Father, and they who know Him and confess His name rejoice now in the Spirit's conviction of righteousness, as He shows to them the person and the things of Christ.² They are glad in the fulness of His joy, who after bearing our curse is now made most blessed for ever, for His own sake and for ours.³ As called and anointed heirs of the grace of life, they are blessed with the blessing which is naturally His alone. Made free by the Son, they are now *free indeed*.

But the chief object of this admirable epistle is not only to show us the completeness of the Saviour's work and its effects, but to admonish believers respecting the conditions upon which alone we can possess and hold fast a personal interest in Christ. It was written for the deliverance of unwary Christians from the snares and devices of the adversary, and for the confirmation and strengthening of their faith. To help those to *abide* in Christ who already have *received* Him is the apostle's earnest aim. God's elect children are not the passive subjects of His power only, though they were so until quickened by His word. Being now alive to God by faith in Jesus Christ, they are kept by His power

² John xvi. 10.

³ John xiv. 28; Ps. xxi. 3-6.

still *through faith*. "From faith to faith" is the order of progression in a growing soul, while the same words are also a true expression of the manner and condition of the life of God.⁴ Now of faith there are divers kinds; but one only of these proceeds from God, as His irrevocable gift, and lives upon His words. By this men are justified, and by this they stand. There is a faith unfeigned, and a false or empty faith. There is a dead and lonely faith without effect, even as there are dead works, so designated by the Spirit of truth because they do not spring from faith. How a true and living faith is proved he lets us see a little further on. We may here notice only that the entanglement with the yoke of bondage, against which we are so emphatically warned, can result solely from our walking *not* by faith, but by the light of a misguided conscience, and in the strength of a perverted will. These Galatians were *desiring* to be under the law. Why? Did faith in Christ originate this wish? Nay; it was the relaxing of their hold upon their living Head and hope that left them conscious of a want which Satan thus artfully pretended to supply. They had forgotten that life is a race, and they had ceased to run. Their early transports had subsided, and their first love, through lack of exercise, was running to decay. Spiritual blindness had been the natural effect of spiritual indolence, and failing to discover, in the clear vision of an active faith, the far-off glory of their hope, they had soon forgotten that they were purged from their old sins, through the influence of the new and unsuspected sin of unbelief.⁵ Instead

⁴ Rom. i. 17.⁵ 2 Peter i. 9.

of laying every weight aside, and running with a patient confidence and joy the race which has the Saviour for its prize, they were wishing to assume, in their vain endeavour to become religious on their own account, a burden which, if they once bound it on them, would crush life and hope together from their souls.

This evil delusion is so common a besetment of God's saints that the apostle's warning is never out of season in the Church. Our natural tendency is ever to lapse back from Christ into ourselves. It is a proof that we have already done so when we think and speak mostly of ourselves, and act with chief reference to ourselves, forgetting that we are crucified with Christ, and that if we are walking in the truth our life *now* and its aims are solely by the faith of Him. The *form* of the bondage under which a once emancipated soul may fall is immaterial. Its reality is always *sin*. Whatever is not of faith is sin. And now let formal Christianity ask itself if uncommanded rites and ceremonies, ordinances and observances, are of faith or not of faith? Whatever is prescribed and charged upon men's consciences, by traditional authority only, is a yoke which differs from the burden of the law in so far as a merely human invention differs from a once binding but now fulfilled and honoured, and therefore to us, obsolete ordinance of God. It differs therefore greatly *for the worse*. The liberty with which Christ made His people free has bound them in a new and lasting bond of obligation to Himself. They are released from law and its penalties to serve in the grateful devotedness of love. They are dispensed from carnal ordi-

nances to keep the new commandment, and pursue the path of righteousness under the gracious leading of the Spirit. To consent therefore to any religious form or habit, which carries not the sanction of Christ's words, is to loosen and enfeeble proportionately the tie of faith which binds us to Himself.

Verse 2. "Behold, I Paul, say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing." Strong words these but true, and loving in their truth. For all who desire to be under law are standing on a fatal brink. If the Galatian believers continued in the path which they were entering thus rashly, it must lead them entirely away from Christ. By the terms of the gospel, justification is *apart* from law, *in Christ*. To put oneself voluntarily under law is therefore to remove from Christ, and be apart from the righteousness which is of God. To accept carnal circumcision was, in the case of these Gentiles in the flesh, to become candidates for the prize of legal righteousness.⁶ It was therefore to frustrate the grace of God, and to pour contempt both on the personal merit and the cross of Christ. It was, consequently, to turn from the good hope of life eternal to the certainty of condemnation and the wrath to come. To such the Saviour and the Justifier was as if He were not through their unbelief. For how can He profit them that seek their safety and honour by some other way? He only is the way to the Father. He cannot blend with other things, for perfection is in Him and Him alone. Moreover, He is *the Lord*. He saves. He pardons.

⁶ Gentiles who accepted circumcision were called by the Jewish doctors "proselytes of righteousness."

He both makes and preaches peace. He is in His own sufficing fulness all, and more than all, that we can need, because in Him the fulness of the Godhead dwells. But if this be true, then to look elsewhere, or give our hand to any other strength, is to deny Him and doubly to destroy ourselves.

Verse 3. "For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law." It is by such just but alarming words that he shakes roughly, as becomes a true watcher for their souls, the besotted minds of these deluded sheep, and undeceives them as to the real nature of the obligation they were so anxious to contract. It is probable that not a few of those whom he here contemplates may have regarded circumcision as little more than a desirable distinction of an honorary kind. They heard others boast of it, and in their spiritual childishness they wished to share what others had, forgetful meanwhile, or unmindful, of the true value of their own. But Paul will have them know that spiritual trifling, or a heedless wandering from the way of truth, may bring consequences not less dangerous than unexpected. Law is not grace; and circumcision, though not of Moses but of the fathers, means law in its unmitigated strictness to those who voluntarily undergo it. The knife of carnal circumcision cuts off the soul that seeks it from the Lord, and by this act he who consents to it lays on his own shoulders the whole burden of legal debt. He becomes in his madness Christ's rival, not His freedman, by undertaking in presumptuous ignorance what no other strength than His could do. Ten thousand talents such an one will find it, and himself a hopeless captive to the end. For he

is in debt to God the judge of all, who deals in *righteousness* with all His creatures; and if His great salvation is neglected and His grace despised, will press without compromise His just claims upon the sinner who trusts by some other means to liquidate his debt.

Such is the condition of the voluntary legalist, as distinguished from the deceived and afflicted self-tormentor, who has never known the true sound of the gospel, and is living miserably on the husks of his own vain strivings, until his eyes are opened to behold the light of his deliverance in the person of his crucified Redeemer. Let us look now for a moment on the bright contrast to this picture. The believer is out of debt for ever to the law, because its claims have all been met in righteousness by Him who for that very purpose was made under law. The handwriting of ordinances has disappeared, and the wounds of Jesus are offered in their stead to the contrite, but delighted, contemplation of our hearts. Our eyes no longer rest upon the cold and unrelenting, though most righteous witness of our countless liabilities, but upon the everlasting monument of our deliverance, and of the grace of Him who paid our ransom with His own most precious blood. The score of sin is clean effaced, for the sinner who has fled for refuge to the hope set before him in the gospel. God has now on the believer claims of a new and altogether different sort. A father does not think of his own children as a creditor regards those who are withholding his just claims. There is on our parts indeed a debt of infinite endurance, but its burden is a joy, and not a pain. For grateful and reverent love is the

deepest and richest of all the manifold emotions which can bless the human soul. The heirs of God are at their ease respecting all those dues, and their attendant penalties, which made them once afraid. For they hold their title and possess their better hope by virtue of an adoption which from natural aliens made them sons indeed, and cast out fear, together with the guilt which gave it birth, by the triumphant and self-sacrificing energy of perfect love.

Verse 4. "Ye are ceased from Christ,⁷ whosoever of you are for justifying yourselves by the law; ye are fallen from grace." "Ye cannot have two Saviours, or be justified with God upon two separate grounds. If then ye are choosing law, ye have no more to do with Christ. The hands which should have held Him fast have been removed from Him, and laid upon another hope." With the terrific language of this verse, we may compare the Lord's immediate teaching in John xv. 6. For how indeed should the true vine acknowledge as its branches those who are seeking establishment of heart in meats and not in grace?⁸ They are seeking legal justification; they are seeking therefore *their own* righteousness, and abandoning, in favour of this mad pursuit, the righteousness of *God* which is by faith of Jesus Christ. The precision of his language should be well observed. He does not say, "ye *are* justified by the law," which would be false and impossible; but "ye are being

⁷ καταργήθητε ἀπὸ Χριστοῦ. Conf. Rom. vii. 2, 6, where the same verb in the same construction is rendered "loosed from," and "delivered from." To "abolish" or "nullify," is its more usual active meaning in the New Testament, but it here has its original force, which is "to leave idle, or unoccupied." ⁸ Heb. xiii. 9.

justified," or seeking righteousness,⁹ "in law." The believer is already justified in Christ. The legalist regards his justification necessarily as prospective. Meanwhile the man who, having begun in the spirit, thus dreams of perfecting himself by the flesh, is already fallen from grace. He has left the congregation of the righteous, and is no more numbered by the Spirit of truth among the living. For the law which he has chosen as his trust is the ministration, not of righteousness, but of sin and condemnation; not giving life, but working wrath. All true hope therefore, for such as depart from the Lord at the instigation of the evil heart of unbelief, is at an end. For by abandoning the only Saviour, they draw back unto perdition. Ceasing to cleave to Him they fall from grace. Their expectation of reward is thenceforth a delusion, and their life, as namers of His name, an empty lie. And that he may save his brethren from their awful danger, he thus unmasks it to its full extent.

Verse 5. "For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith." In contrast to the foregoing warning, we have now a distinct and triumphant assertion of the sure standing and hope of those who by grace continue in the faith. The verse is a summary of the believer's title and blessing as an heir of God. The apostle speaks for himself, and all who are partakers of like precious faith, for those

⁹ οἵτινες ἐν νόμῳ δικαιώσθε. This construction seems chosen to point more forcibly the contrast. In the Lord the believer has righteousness. In law these half-apostates from the faith were disposing themselves to seek it. It makes no real difference in the sense whether we take the verb in the middle or passive voice.

who are no longer carnal but spiritual, in the sight of God, and in the spirit and disposition of their minds. His description, let us well observe, is not doctrinal only, but strongly experimental also. It is true of those only who are led of the Spirit, and whose faith is really in exercise. A Christian sleeping, or careless, or wandering, is not truly *waiting*; though, if really what he claims to be, the hope which he is neglecting is the true end of his calling. But what we are shown here is the normal state of the true believer as a child of God. Already justified, and sanctified in Christ, he no longer has righteousness before him as an object of attainment, but the *hope*, rather, which belongs to righteousness. The Spirit is both the seal and witness of his acceptance and completeness in his glorified Redeemer, and the revealer to his soul of Christ, in all His blessed fulness, as the portion of his inheritance and his cup. As believers, "we were saved by (or for) hope."¹ To believe on still, and to remain in this joyful persuasion, with patient continuance in well-doing, is the principle of Christian life. The toil of acquisition, for them who are already justified by faith, as respects the attainment of justification, is at an end; we rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him who is Himself our hope, rejoicing in Him meanwhile with a joy that is unspeakable and full of glory.² Effort in another sense indeed continues, or to speak more accurately, there is effort of a new and entirely different character. As sinners in our sins, we had to cease from our own work, and to work the work of

¹ τῇ γὰρ ἐλπίδι ἐσώθημεν.—Romans viii. 24.

² Psalm xxxvii. 7; 1 Timothy i. 1; 1 Peter i. 8.

God by faith. As sinners, justified; as *saints*, we have a work of our own to do, a calling to attain, a perfection to reach, a rest to enter; all which things are realized by our continuing in the faith which first drew us from ourselves to Christ.

The harmony of spiritual truth is full of natural contradictions. To abide in the only true vine, we must cleave with purpose of heart to the Lord; to rest, we must labour; to retain and enjoy the free gift of God, we must hold it fast, and fight in its defence; to stand in righteousness, we must also run a race; we must continue in the faith and strive still against sin. For faith is not a sentiment, but a living and efficient power with its own results. Such efforts as those spoken of above are only hope in its demonstrative activity. Hope speeds the runner in his race, sustains the labourer in his toil, and animates the mind, in which the true ambition has the mastery, to a zealous steadfastness and unreserved devotion to its aim.³ Glory, and honour, and incorruption are constituent ingredients of "that blessed hope," which forms the crown of the justified believer's patience. We rejoice in hope of the glory of God, Christ being Himself in us as the hope of glory.⁴ But where, in the presence of this hope, is the lawyer or the scribe? The Spirit witnesses against the sin of man, but attests also to the believer, and seals to him as his own eternal portion in Christ, the righteousness of God. And what is now tasted in anticipation, by those who have the earnest of the Spirit, will be presently fulfilled in fact; when the race of them that are now pursuing the prize of their high calling

³ 2 Cor. v. 6-9.

⁴ Rom. v. 2; Col. i. 27.

is ended, and they are found and glorified for ever in the Christ whom they have won.⁵

Verse 6. "For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love." The law made nothing perfect; but perfection is in Christ. Circumcision, therefore, in the presence of the righteousness of God, becomes again uncircumcision, since flesh, in any case, is excluded from the kingdom and promises of God. Believers are in Christ, in whom all fulness dwells. Things, therefore, which make men differ from each other, advantageously or otherwise, have in the new creation neither place nor memory. To be in Christ, is to be apart from law, because no longer in the flesh, but in the Spirit. For the same reason, it is to be separate also from the former way of evil—"the will of the Gentiles," as Peter says;⁶ for *uncircumcision* has no more strength or place in the new man than circumcision. Boasting of either kind is equally excluded from the congregation of the just.⁷ Judicial death has, in the cross of Christ, extinguished both legal penalties and natural rights. It is in Him who is, and has proved Himself to be, "the resurrection and the life," that the believer lives and stands. *Faith* only profits here, because faith lives on that which is outside and above itself; believing and living on the words of *God*, and therefore resting in His love. But a faith which tastes the love of God loves also in return, and this love becomes the manner and power of the true believer's life.⁸ In the declaration that "faith works by love,"

⁵ Phil. iii. 8, *seq.*

⁶ 1 Peter iv. 3.

⁷ Rom. iii. 27.

⁸ 1 John iii. 14.

there is expressed concisely the essential difference of character which distinguishes the new man and its longings from both law and natural license. Law sets its deluded slaves to labour for themselves, while lawless nature admits no obligation but its own unbridled wilfulness. Faith, on the other hand, *rests* in God's finished peace, but is not idle. It works for Another, whom it loves, and trusts, and honours, having nothing of its own to seek. Provided for, and blessed supremely in its object, it finds itself relieved for ever from the former sense of insecurity, in order to engage itself entirely with Him and His things, who has redeemed His people for Himself. Faith wars also as well as works, but not at its own charges, or for its own ends. If Christ's peculiar people are zealous of good works, it is because their hearts are indwelt by Himself.

. Verse 7. "Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?" They had once known and practised what he here describes; for while their faith was young and vigorous, their love was strong. While the grace of Christ was freshly tasted in their souls, they spake to one another of their common blessedness in Him, and cheered each other as they ran together, with a steady alacrity and a godly emulation, their arduous but welcome race of faith and patience. Their thoughts were then of heaven, and of Him who won it for them by His cross, not of earth and the good will of men; and they suffered gladly the reproach of Christ, by reason of the joy and peace which ruled within their hearts. Who then had stopped them on this course? There is but one original adversary to the way of truth,

though his methods and devices are innumerable. The Apostle, as more plainly appears presently,⁹ had his eye when thus writing on some conspicuous and persuasive judaizer, to whose influence the defection of the Galatian churches was, in his judgment, more especially due. But the question here put seems designed rather to remind them of their unseen spiritual enemy, and to arouse them to a renewed vigilance against the subtle and malignant watcher of their peace. Inveigled as they had been into a false path, and already entering the mist of darkness, they had lost for a season, their capability of discerning and withstanding the wiles of the devil, whom they had been unconsciously accepting as their guide, instead of the true Shepherd and Bishop of their souls. And so he proceeds—

Verse 8. "This persuasion cometh not of Him that calleth you." Whence then did it come? They had been called of *God*, and the answer of their early faith had led them into the way of peace. Persuaded since, by Satan's ministers, they were desiring a path which promised to conduct them, as they vainly thought, to a "higher Christianity;" but which leads those who pursue it to its end into the darkness that *God* never lights. Like Israel of old, they were going a whoring from the living Truth, by following a lying shade, and destruction is the end of all that repent not at the voice of His rebuke.¹ The strange woman, with her false allurements, had enticed them. After living for awhile upon the meat of *God*, they were lusting for stolen waters and for secret bread;

⁹ *Infra*, verse 10.

¹ Deut. xxxi. 16; Psalm lxxiii. 27; Rev. ii. 23.

and already they were entering, if they heeded not His warning words, the way that leads the backslider in heart from life to death.² God's calling is salvation to the soul that hearkens to it with a constant mind; all other persuasion is from beneath, and leads men to perdition if obeyed. God will not give Christ's glory to an enemy of the cross of Christ, and such are all who follow earthly and not heavenly things.³

Let the reader of this book then put strictly to himself this question: What persuasion or conviction governs *me*, or what manner of solicitation do I follow, as I walk this life? Is his way self-chosen and right only in his eyes? Let him stop: for that way has a fatal end.⁴ Does he follow carelessly a multitude? He should reflect that few, and not many, choose the way of life.⁵ If not in a moral and spiritual lethargy, he has an expectation of some kind, and is living for some end: For *what* end? Does he labour and employ his bodily or mental strength? For *what*? He is acting on some principle—what is it? There are many “persuasions” in active operation at the present time; but, with one exception, they are false; for if we gather not with Christ, we are but scattering abroad. Let us remember also, that self-interest, if accepted as a rule of life, becomes self-destruction at the end; and that spiritual theorizing is not faith in God. There are many deceiving spirits in the world; there is one Spirit of truth and holiness, who has His dwelling in God's living Church, while, as a suffering witness, He is also in the world. The mind

² Prov. ix. 13–18.

³ Phil. iii. 15, 19.

⁴ Prov. xiv. 12.

⁵ Matt. vii. 13, 14.

of that Spirit is enunciated in the written word, which He only who indited it can truly interpret to our souls. From first to last, the Scriptures are "the word of Christ;" and we may be sure that we are governed by a true persuasion, when the Son of God, to whom the Spirit witnesses, becomes both our trust and hope for ever, and the law and light of our present life. He only leads in the way of righteousness, and causes them that love Him to inherit substance; for *Himself*, and all that He is worth, is the assured fulness of His people's hope.⁶

Verse 9. "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump." In this proverbial sentence, the weighty import of which is attested by its occurrence in two separate epistles, we are warned of the danger of entertaining in any form or measure, either doctrine or practice that is foreign to the simplicity of the Gospel. In the language of the New Testament, leaven always means something of the old and condemned nature, as opposed to the new. It is capable therefore, of a wide and varied application, and we accordingly find it so treated in the passages where it occurs. Moral iniquity and doctrinal perversion are its two chief meanings, as the occasions on which this proverb is repeated clearly prove.⁷ The Corinthian believers were endangered and defiled through their indifference to the gross moral evil which was suffered to go without condemnation or rebuke in the midst of their assembly. The Galatian churches, on the other hand, were contracting a defilement of a still more fatal kind, by consenting to doctrines which perverted, and thus destroyed, the Gospel of

⁶ Prov. viii. 20, 21.

⁷ *cf.* 1 Cor. v. 6.

the grace of God. In both cases, the majesty of holiness and truth was outraged by the same means; by the admission, namely, of the old leaven under different forms. Things incongruous with Christ, and contrary to the mind of the Holy Spirit of God, were tolerated and accepted. Holiness was sacrificed in the one instance to a false view of Christian liberty; and in the other, truth was corrupted by human additions to the testimony of the Holy Ghost.

Hypocrisy and worldliness,⁸ malice and wickedness, and whatever else belongs to the "old man," which believers have put off with his deeds,⁹ fall under the same figurative description. There is but one inference to be drawn from the apostle's words in the passage now before us. Believers should so value their standing and privileges, as men in Christ, as to watch against constantly, and withstand with the liveliest jealousy and decision, any and every deviation from the plain teaching of God's word. If *that* be followed, in the spirit of obedient faith, holiness and truth are equally preserved. If, on the contrary, human thought or traditional authority and observances be allowed a place in that church which is the habitation of God by the Spirit, there is in reality an end to both, though bold pretensions and specious appearances may continue to beguile the minds of those who walk not in the light of God. To the neglect of this warning there is owing now the leavened lamp of modern Christianity, where, if truth still lives, it lives and strives and suffers in an unceasing conflict with that which names the name of Christ without departing from iniquity.

⁸ Mark viii. 15; Luke xii. 1.

⁹ Col. iii. 9.

The mystery of iniquity has long been working. The Lord's parable, mistaken and misapplied, to the helping on of the very evils against which it warns, by most of those who undertake to guide the flock of God, has long been verified in fact, and the crisis is at hand.¹ May our ears be opened to heed with diligence Christ's faithful and health-giving words.² To return,

Verse 10. "I have confidence in you through the Lord," &c. Deep indeed was Paul's grief and disappointment at their altered state, but he understood thoroughly its cause, and had no thought of giving place to the devil. To regain his confidence in his delinquent brethren, he looks beyond them to the Lord, into whose grace they had been called. He had spoken unreservedly and in the strict severity of truth, of the perilous nature and tendency of the course into which they were enticed. He now throws over them again the covering shelter of that name which they had lately been so really though unconsciously dishonouring, and in the boldness of his love restores them to their former place and honour as confessors of the cross. They are a part of Christ's purchased flock, and as a faithful under-shepherd he will stand in His name between them and their destroyer. Abused and defrauded they had been through lies, but truth ministered in love should lead their souls again into the light of the Lord, and bring back to them their former joy. When they thought on what he was then writing to them, and recalled to mind their earlier experiences, they would return, he felt persuaded, to a sounder mind. But as

¹ Matt. xiii. 33; 2 Thess. ii. 7. ² 1 Tim. vi. 3.

to the minister of falsehood who had troubled them with his deceivings, the Lord who claimed and sheltered them should deal justly with him also. If he continued to pervert the right ways of the Lord, he would find to his cost that the Judge of all is stronger than his adversaries.³

Verse 11. "And I, brethren, if I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution? then is the offence of the cross ceased." He here contrasts, at least by implication, his own condition, as a confessor of the name of Christ, with theirs. They had once suffered many things for Christ, when they were as he⁴ in the spirit of their minds. With like precious faith there is a like experience of the hatred of the prince of this world on the part of those who truly follow Christ.⁵ But since he had left them things had changed. With them persecution for the gospel's sake was ceasing, on their preparation to accept the law; while he suffered still the reproach of Christ and the afflictions of the gospel, as the crown of his unaltered boldness in the faith. With him to live was Christ. It was the doctrine of the cross that both sustained his own spirit in the joy and peace of God, and stirred the anger of his persecutors. There is room for a conjecture, from the opening words of this verse, that in addition to their other spiritual frauds, the false teachers had persuaded the Galatians that Paul himself lived under law, and preached circumcision among those Gentile

³ The closing words "whosoever he be," imply both a doubt of his identity and a conviction that he was a man of note. He was in all probability a Jerusalem Pharisee, of the same spirit as those of whom we read in Acts xv.

⁴ *Ante*, chap. iii. 4.

⁵ 1 Peter v. 9.

believers who were sufficiently advanced to receive it. His occasional practice with respect to the observance of this rite may have lent also a colour to their assertions; while the flattering assurances of their false guides that their progress in the gospel had ripened them for this much-to-be-desired addition to their faith, would doubtless have its effect upon the unsuspecting minds of these sincere but too impressible and easily persuaded babes in Christ. It was a promotion in their eyes to a better degree than they had hitherto attained. They would emerge, they imagined, as disciples of Moses, from contempt and obscurity to honour and a general esteem. The apostle's indignation at the false dealing of his adversaries is worthy of their ill desert.

Verse 12. "I would they were even cut off which trouble you." It was no time for civilities and smoothness of speech. The murderer of souls was ravaging the flock of Christ, and truth has no courtesies for falsehood. Love is of God, and deals ever with the sincerity and truth belonging to its source. Consideration is shown by a true servant of righteousness, not to the doers, but the sufferers of wrong. Paul's tone to the Galatian saints is alternately severe and kind, as he warns or soothes them in his labour to restore their souls. But he hates them that hate the Lord, and is grieved with them that rise up against Him.⁶ He counts them his own enemies for the truth's sake, which he loves. Yet his anger is with meekness still. He *wishes*, but his Lord alone can *act* as the avenger of His name. There is little of the spirit here shown by the apostle in the religious

⁶ Psalm cxxxix. 21, 22.

activities of this day, in which orthodoxy and heterodoxy can exchange friendly greetings upon the broad platform of humanitarian sympathy, and regard each other with a mutual esteem. Honour and consideration are now for man rather than for God. The sharp lines of truth are lost in the shadow of natural sentiment, and the cross is too often little more than a meretricious ornament for eyes to look upon, instead of the heart-subduing power of divine love to captivate the soul, and bind it abidingly to Him who suffered there the pains of our redemption. Everywhere there is a spirit of compromise at work, and already not a few of the chief doctrines of the Gospel are treated as "open questions" by men who falsely style themselves ministers of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. But these symptoms of a fast-coming apostacy are, if saddening, cheering also for the waiting and watchful Christian, by their promise of the Master's speedy coming. Let no true believer doubt that persecution is in store for him, if he desires to walk godly in Christ Jesus. "Enlightened Christianity" in modern phrase means Christianity without the truth of the Gospel and the power of godliness. Troublers infested the early Church, and an inspired apostle wishes them cut off. Things are fast approaching a state when truth will be the only troubler of those who in what bears the name of God's temple and His house will be generally serving lying vanities. The prophets whom Jerusalem slew are the example of exceptional latter-day faith. They would not prophecy smooth things, and, therefore, suffered hard things at the hands of those who loved unhallowed ease in Zion. So must it be in spirit and

principle with those who cleave now to God's testimonies with a faith which knows and follows Christ alone. Let a modern Christian adopt a party watchword or sectarian creed, and he will have both society and ease. Let him stand only for the name and claims of God's crucified and glorified Son, and he will find that his Master's words have lost none of their meaning through the lapse of time.⁷

Verse 13. "For, brethren, ye were called unto liberty," &c. They had been called by the Gospel into the grace of Christ, and therefore unto liberty. Nor has he to repeat that call, but rather to revive in their hearts and consciences a worthier appreciation of it. The Jewish teachers appear to have found their occasion in the desire of many of the Galatian believers after personal holiness. Aware of their shortcomings and conflicts as confessors of the name of Christ, and longing for a more entire mastery of the evil that was in them, they were induced to listen willingly to a doctrine which promised them falsely in *themselves* what they had already, and could only have, in Christ. But to this legal delusion there is a licentious counterpart. For "liberty," taken in a natural sense, means only wilfulness. In its true and spiritual sense, it is but another name for godliness, its groundwork being exemption from the guilt of sin, and its spirit and power being the love which is of God. Yet liberty, implies in its very nature, a discretion in him who has it. It is manifestly a state which may be abused as well as used. The apostle, therefore, when seeking to reinstate his erring brethren on the everlasting foundations, and asserting for

⁷ 1 James v. 10; John xvi. 33.

them a deliverance from every yoke of bondage, warns them not less earnestly against the perils of a misuse of the liberty of grace. They were not redeemed to *themselves* from all iniquity, but to *God*. Self-assertion, in any shape, is entirely incompatible with a right apprehension of our new standing in Christ. Self-seeking and self-pleasing were things belonging to their former state, when, in ignorance of God, they measured everything by nature's standard, which is always self. But now that they had learnt God, in the truth of His salvation and the manner of His love towards themselves, their wisdom and glory are to be practically imitators of Him whose thoughts and ways are manifested in His Son. To serve one another, in the bowels of that love which in so marvellous a sort had first waited on themselves, was their present opportunity, which, if they used it wisely, would be not only a joy and blessing to them now, but hereafter also an eternal crown.

Verse 14. "For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." They had desired, in their ignorance, to be under law; which meant, if it had any meaning, a wish to serve. This wish the apostle now meets in a manner which must needs command their approbation, by citing for them the second of the two great commandments of the law. And although he does not here notice the other and greater of the two, because the old commandment has taken a new form since God Himself fulfilled it in His Son,^s yet he is bold to say that *all* the law is fulfilled in this one saying; because the law is one and not many, and the self-

^s 1 John iv. 10, 11.

same Spirit pervades all its words. As, therefore, the apostle, when reasoning elsewhere on the impossibility of the law's fulfilment on the part of one carnal and sold under sin, had made the command, "Thou shalt not covet" a decisive vindication of his doctrine;⁹ so now the fulfilling of the old commandment in the newness of the spirit is truly a doing of the whole law. Love is the end of the commandment, the fulfilling of the law;¹ not any longer by the force of penal obligation, but in successful imitation, by the grace of God, of Him who took its heavy burden from our necks.² None who loves not God can truly love his brother; to keep the lesser charge is, therefore, to fulfil the whole commandment. And how shall this be done, save in the power of a faith which works by love? Let their legal teachers exemplify to these Galatians their own doctrine of preceptive obedience if they could; let their modern followers do the like now if they can. Meanwhile let true believers know, and well remember, that their love to Godward is but a faint echo of God's perfect love in Christ to them; and that, if they love God, whom they have not seen, they must needs love their brother also, who is before them in His name and likeness to invite their kindness every day.³

Verse 15. "But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed," &c. A dreary contrast to the foregoing, yet a wholesome word in season. For his language, though in form a caution, evidently contemplates an evil not remote and possible only, but already in active force in their assemblies—thus quickly and bitterly

⁹ Rom. vii.

¹ 1 Tim. i. 5; Rom. xiii. 10.

² 1 Cor. xi. 1.

³ 1 John iv. 20, 21.

were discovering themselves the practical effects of their descent, in the spirit of their minds, from grace to law! With a lower standing, lower morals had come also. Instead of each esteeming other better than themselves, in self-forgetting brotherly affection, there was among them a self-conscious and mutually destructive emulation. Each strove to reach beyond his neighbour, in the delusive race of personal pre-eminence into which the deceiver had allured them. Christ died to unite His chosen in a new and common bond. But where now was Christ? Where was the tender and soul-filling remembrance of His cross, when their hearts were being set so eagerly upon another and strange love? Caring only for themselves, they were biting and devouring one another; for self-love means always hostility to others. But where, at this rate, was the edifying of Christ's mystic body? God's building cannot grow and be compacted by the untempered mortar of self-love and unbelief. The work of righteousness is peace; but by the law is the knowledge of *sin*, with corresponding fruits.⁴ Wasting and consumption, instead of stability and peace, are the natural results of seeking to the law for spiritual strength.

Verse 16. "I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh." He touches here the root of their disease. They had felt the exceeding difficulty of satisfying their own conscience in their daily walk. Hence all the mischief. A love of goodness, *misdirected*, had led them into unsuspected evil and disaster. But the question which their later guides had falsely answered was one which truth

⁴ Rom. vii. 5.

could not disown, and to meet it with a right solution is the apostle's present aim. To walk, he says, in the Spirit is the sole condition of a practical exemption from the lust of the flesh. But walking in the Spirit is possible to those only who abide in Christ, and who reckon consequently both their old nature and the law, which was its ineffectual bridle, among the former things which faith no longer sees before it in its race.⁵ It is as if he said: Engage your hearts' affections with the Lord, and regulate your liberated and purged consciences by the sayings of His lips, and you will need no other safeguard from the paths of the destroyer.⁶ Christ's words, which are spirit and life, are strength also for their own fulfilment to the heart of faith. Prohibitive legal injunctions give no power against the evils they denounce. "Touch not, taste not, handle not" are rules for sinners, not for saints.⁷ The law of the Spirit is liberty, and has its fountain in the heart wherein Christ dwells. What He did both perfectly and naturally, when He pleased the Father, the generation of God's children are in their measure empowered to do, by yielding themselves to the will of Him who works His own good pleasure in His saints.⁸ The promise here delivered, if conditional, is also without limit; though, as we shall see presently, *perfection*, in its subjective meaning, is a hope only while these bodies of humiliation are unchanged. Paul could say much in his own name, though to the praise of the glory of His grace who kept him; but he could not say that he had attained, or was already perfect. So he ran and battled to the end.⁹

⁵ Phil. iii. 13.⁶ Psalm xvii. 4.⁷ Col. ii. 20-23.⁸ Phil. ii. 13; Heb. xiii. 21.

Cor. iv. 4; Phil. iii. 12.

Verse 17. "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh;" &c. We have in this very important declaration a fresh argument of the utter futility of the law as a means of human perfection, or even amelioration. For the law is, as he has insisted elsewhere, "spiritual;" but the flesh, to restrain which the commandment was delivered, is declared to be in constitutional and essential antagonism to the Spirit. The things themselves are natural contraries, and man, if regenerate, is subject to the influence of both. With his flesh he serves the law of sin, and cannot serve any other, seeing that sin has the sovereign mastery of his flesh, that is, of his old and corrupt nature and its wills. Now the man in Christ is to be distinguished from what belongs to him. His life is Christ, and Christ who is his life not only abides *for* him in the presence of the Father, upon His throne and in His bosom—hidden in God—but is *in* him also, as the effect of that true faith which receives with meekness the engrafted word. But as long as he is in an unchanged body he is in the flesh experimentally, though neither *of* the flesh nor *after* the flesh, as respects his proper generation as a child of God, but distinctively *spiritual*—"not in the flesh, but in the Spirit."¹ Hence conflict is the normal condition of a saint while in this mortal body. He rejoices in his liberty, he groans being burdened, and longs to be clothed upon with his new and eternal house from heaven.² Solicited incessantly by his old nature and its lusts, he is sustained against it by the Spirit, who reveals to him the things of Christ, and gives him desires of a godly

¹ Rom. viii. 5-9.² 2 Cor. v. 4.

sort. There is moreover a divine *intention* in this state of things.³ It is part of the purpose of Him who has called us into the grace of Christ to exercise both faith and patience in His saints. We must all be tried, as Abraham our father was. The issue of this trial is not doubtful; since our very *calling* is to *inherit* a blessing. God's calling is without repentance, and its prize is in the full view of our faith; while our hope is none other than the Lord Himself, who is personally both our righteousness and strength. If we are tried, it is for the evoking and proving of that which, in the sight of Him who gave it, is far more precious than gold which perishes at last, though able to withstand the fire.⁴

The great principle here stated is that *our* wishes, whether good or evil, are not and cannot be either the law of our being or the arbiters of our course, but the will of Him who both suffers evil to beset us, and *Himself* works in us that which is well pleasing in His sight. It is with the many sons whom God is bringing to His glory, as it was with the only begotten while on earth.⁵ Their calling also is to do the will of God. But there is this essential difference, that in Him was no sin, no flesh therefore in an evil sense; while in us there is no natural goodness, or concurrence of our carnal wills with that of Him who fulfils in His chosen the good pleasure of His goodness, and the work of faith with power.⁶

³ The intention is clearly expressed in the latter clause of the verse: *ἵνα μὴ ἂν θέλῃτε, ταῦτα ποιῇτε*, "that what you *will* you may not *do*."

⁴ Rom. xi. 29; 1 Thess. v. 24; 1 Peter i. 7.

⁵ John vi. 38.

⁶ 2 Thess. i. 11.

Jesus was passive, but all-consenting. Of us it must be said that we are inwrought by a Power whose first task is to conquer our wills. Yet, though conflict be the habit and necessity of spiritual life, and battles of shaking may try the virtue which we are charged to take as an addition to our faith, it will be with the tabrets and harps of constant victory for those who stay themselves upon the Lord, and watchfully continue in His love.⁷ With songs of deliverance He will compass the path of an obedient faith.⁸ Above all let it be remembered that, as soldiers of Christ, we fight to keep what is *our own* by God's free gift, not to win for ourselves a doubtful and unsettled claim.

Verse 18. "But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law." This verse, with which may be compared, in respect to its moral force and bearing, Romans vi. 14, completes the preparation of the true believer for his fight of faith, and at the same time turns the hope of the hypocrite to foolishness. They that are *led* of the Spirit are they that hate and fain would shun themselves, both because they know themselves, and for the love they bear to their Redeemer; who yield themselves to God as alive from the dead, and their members as instruments of righteousness to God. Profession of godliness may be either true or false. If the latter, the sinners who thus fill the measure of their sin *are* under law. For such the law was made.⁹

⁷ Isaiah xxx. 32. I use freely this and similar prophetic Scriptures for the intermediate purpose of Christian exhortation and comfort; *all* promises of God being addressed, in Christ, to us who now believe. (2 Cor. i. 20.)

⁸ Psalm xxxii. 7; Rom. viii. 37. ⁹ 1 Tim. i. 9.

There are those who with the highest spiritual pretensions are pronounced by the Searcher of hearts to be "natural, not having the Spirit,"¹ and their deeds are according to their kind. They seek themselves, and glory in a liberty which is all their own. But as many as are led of the Spirit seek, and think, and speak of Him to whom the Spirit witnesses. These are not under law; for the hand that leads them has already broken from their necks that former and intolerable yoke, and they learn now the way of God's commandments after a new and altogether different sort. To such His commandments are no longer a grievous burden, but a welcome and easy charge, because borne in the strength of the love that has imposed them.² The relation of this verse to the exhortation already delivered in verse 16 should not be overlooked. There, it is *walking* in the Spirit that is in question; here, our being *led*. All Christian service is *voluntary*.³ We are free to serve. But, as we have seen, it is God that worketh both to will and to do of His own good pleasure in His saints. Self-confidence scorns guidance. To be led and pastured by the Shepherd and Bishop of their souls is the desire and delight of those who reverence His person and who know His love.

Verses 19-21. "Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these," &c. The *lust* of the flesh brings forth, according to its evil opportunities, its *works*, which are now specified, in their principal varieties, as objects of fear and abhorrence to the spiritual mind. What is here presented to us is a general description of the evil activities of our fallen

¹ Jude 19. ² 1 John v. 3, 4. ³ 1 Cor. ix. 19; xvi. 12.

and marred humanity, and offers to our contemplation a dreadful and most humiliating catalogue of the capabilities, the tendencies, and the effects of an unregenerate and therefore godless will. It is a sufficient, but not exhaustive, statement of the moral ground of the sentence by which "flesh and blood" are for ever excluded from the kingdom of God. Of these things it is needless here to speak particularly. A few however may be noticed of those among them which, being less offensive to the natural conscience, are on that account more dangerous to the unwatchful saint.

"*Idolatry*," a thing to be fled from,⁴ yet too often embraced by those who are deceived by names, has Christian as well as pagan forms. Its immediate object may be an obsolete ordinance of God, or a corrupt invention of man. "Nehushtan" is on a moral par with Aaron's calf,⁵ while a crucifix or other "holy emblem of our faith" is but a spurious fraud upon the heart, which needs for its stay and comfort not an artificial emblem, but the living Truth Himself. It is through the spirit of idolatry, which belongs universally to our old nature, that the very table of the Lord has so often become a snare. The bread and wine, which Christ consecrated as a perpetual remembrance of His own body and blood to the faith of His elect, being desecrated by a fictitious transmutation to the false and unhallowed end of an idolatrous worship. A faith that endures sees Him that is invisible, with no aid from the natural eye, while it views and handles what is visible in this ever blessed ordinance in the light which shines from Him.⁶

⁴ 1 Cor. x. 7, 14. ⁵ 2 Kings xviii. 4. ⁶ Heb. xi. 27.

The measure of this evil is wide as the habitable earth. Wherever men are, it is either latent or in act. All that in external worship or in private habit engages the heart's attention, yet is not of the Spirit, is idolatry. Faith loves and lives on that which neither eye can see nor fancy feign. Art cannot help faith, but may easily mislead it, and abuse it. To what an extent this has been proved let the history of Christendom attest. "Little children, keep yourselves from idols," was the parting injunction of Christ's last inspired witness. But "idols of gold, and silver, and brass," have drawn and draw still the eyes and hearts of earthly-minded namers of the name of Christ, nor will the plagues of God dislodge the spirit of idolatry from the heart of unregenerate men.⁷ Art, secular and religious, still flourishes, and will yet advance. But we do well to remember that the crown of all idolatries is to be the masterpiece and miracle of human skill as inspired from beneath.⁸ To that crisis the whole course of this age of religious godlessness is tending. Let it be earnestly remembered also that of the "members which are upon the earth," which men risen with Christ are exhorted to mortify, the only one which receives distinctively the surname of "idolatry" is that covetousness, or selfish love of acquisition,⁹ which is so broadly marked a character of our times. Idolatry is essentially the worship and service of the god of this world, and is practised wherever the lusts or fears of men prevail against their faith. It is the very strength and ornament of falsehood, the first-born and chief servant of the father of lies ;

⁷ 1 John v. 21 : Rev. ix. 20.

⁸ Rev. xiii. 14, 15.

⁹ *πλεονεξία*. Col. iii. 5.

and its unrepentant votaries must have their final place where all other liars are.¹ Idolatry, in one word, is the madness of the wicked, as true faith is the wisdom of the just. But, allowed or disallowed, its spirit lives in every mortal man. The heart that is not fully occupied by Christ, and living on His love, will have shrines for His adversary in its corners, whether consciously or not.

"*Witchcraft*" (or sorcery), a form of Satanic mischief prevalent in all ages, is rife in our own than is commonly supposed, and is likely to abound yet more. From Egypt to Babylon the great, and from Pharaoh to the last and proudest of the race of wilful kings, this spirit has been working and will work. It is vastly comprehensive in its range, as well as varied and subtle in its energy. Sometimes declaring openly its true character under the name of spiritualism, it far oftener assumes forms of a less suspected kind. It is at work wherever truth is systematically opposed, and power is ascribed to any other than the living God. It has ruined the Chaldean Babylon, and is written among the chief charges of the Spirit of truth against the city which is called in Scripture "mystery,"² and which drinks the wine-cup of the wrath of God.³ It is active at this moment in the palace and the workshop, and is fast hurrying its dupes to their fore-written place.⁴

"*Hatred*,"⁵ alas! may lurk and multiply its acts where love's language is familiar to the lips. The

¹ Rev. xxi. 8; xxii. 15.

² Isaiah xlvii. 9, 12.

³ Rev. xviii. 23; xvi. 19.

⁴ Rev. xxi. 8.

⁵ *ἔχθραι*, "hatreds," the plural being used, I suppose, because he is speaking of the *works* of the flesh.

carnal mind is full of it, with God as its object who is love itself; and let saints remember that it is operating in *their* hearts also whenever they accept the friendship of the world.⁶ "*Variance*" (or strifes)⁷ there must needs be between the children of this world and the children of light, and of the kingdom of God; but the active party in this quarrel is the former, not the latter, whose calling is to peace. Within the Church, contentions grow with the decay of faith and love. "*Emulations*" of a carnal kind are fatal; but there are others which are a praise to them that strive.⁸ The one is born of envy, the other of true love. The first is nursed by ignorance, the last excited and sustained by knowledge. Paul had beyond all others known and proved in his own practice the opposite meanings of this term. Zeal made him, as a Pharisee, a persecutor of the Church; as a Christian, her devoted minister and slave.⁹

Wraths,¹ or fits of passion are, in men that profess to know God, most commonly ebullitions of false zeal. Man's anger never works the righteousness of God, but constantly resists it. It was when full of the indignation of rebuked self-righteousness that the men of Nazareth rose up in vain to kill the Lord.² In Gentile as in Jew, we see the same exciting cause producing like effects.³ Both anger and wrath are to be put off by those who would put on, in their completeness, the garments of salvation and the ornaments of praise.⁴ "*Party strifes*"⁵ stand next

⁶ Rom. viii. 7; Psalm iv. 4.

⁷ ἐρις.

⁸ Heb. x. 24.

⁹ Phil. iii. 6; 1 Cor. ix. 19; 2 Cor. iv. 5.

¹ θυμοί.

² Luke iv. 28-30.

³ Acts xix. 28, seq.

⁴ Col. iii. 6, seq.

⁵ ἐριθίαι.

upon this dreary list, and are among the commonest, as well as least excusable, of the works of the flesh which show themselves within the Church of God. From the beginning of the gospel this form of evil has defiled and dishonoured the ministry of truth, though, thanks be to God, truth's efficacious power is not in its ministers but in itself. It has infested,⁶ almost to its utter dissolution, that body which Christ calls His own, from the Corinthian scandals until now. It fades and disappears only before the presence of the cross, when the memory of Him who bore it in His lowly grace for us, and died not to divide but to bind together into one body, with no other mind than His, the children whom the Father gave to Him, is recalled freshly by the Spirit to our hearts.⁷ It is well that those who think lightly of such things, should be reminded that to continue in this disposition to the end is a fatal condition of the human soul.⁸

"*Divisions*,"⁹ a natural effect of the working of the evil principle last noticed, were an early subject of the Spirit's warning and rebuke. They existed at Corinth, and were dreaded at Rome,¹ when the same apostle wrote his letters to the churches there, and how directly the false zeal of the evil workers in Galatia was tending to the same result need not be pointed out. "*Heresies*," which appear when the wilfulness of error has been more or less allowed to prosper, are an ordained necessity, we are told by the same witness, for the making manifest of them that

⁶ Phil. i. 16-18. ⁷ Phil. ii. 3, *seq.* ⁸ Rom. ii. 8.

⁹ διχοστασίαι: ill rendered "seditions" in A.V.

¹ 1 Cor. iii. 3; Rom. xvi. 17.

are approved. But a fearful guilt belongs to such as bring them in, to the corrupting of the work of God.² Happy are they who in this day of clashing pretensions, and scantiness of true spiritual power, are neither in doctrine, in spirit, nor in practice, open to the charge of heresy. For it exists in principle wherever the immediate mastery of the Son of God over His own house, by the Spirit who reveals and represents Him, as the "other Comforter," is not truly known and owned.

Through "*envy*" Christ was delivered to the hands of His unrighteous judge, and among the churches, not of Galatia only, the same destructive leaven was working to alienate the sheep of Christ from one who cared for them in the true spirit of his master.³ If envyings are not laid aside, with guile and malice, and hypocrisies and all evil speakings, the sincere milk of the word will turn to gall instead of spiritual nourishment in those who presumptuously use it with an unhumbled and self-seeking mind.⁴ With respect to the remaining particulars of this roll of things hateful to the Lord it is needless to say much.

"*Murders*" are final acts of passionate or calculating hatred, as the case may be. That a Christian should be chargeable with such might seem impossible, if it were not remembered that the flesh still lusts against the Spirit without change; and inspired warnings are never uttered without ground.⁵ Besides, it is the habit of God, who searches our hearts, to give to the

² 2 Peter ii. 1. For a fuller notice of the meaning of this term, see *Notes on First Corinthians*, chap. xi. 19.

³ 2 Cor. xi.; Phil. i. 15.

⁴ 1 Peter ii. 1; 1 Tim. vi. 3-5; 2 Cor. ii. 17. ⁵ 1 Peter iv. 15.

tendencies He sees their final names. Thus, if not lovers of men, we are *killers* of men, in the eyes of Him who spared not His own Son for our sakes.⁶

“*Drunkennes*” and “*revellings*,” as vices less harmful generally to others than to those who indulge in them, are by ordinary moralists regarded with a lenient eye. The latter are indeed, under slightly modified designations, among the accepted social proprieties of nominal Christian society. Fashion, not the love and fear of God, determines the measure of this license, whether personal or social. There are relatively drunken and sober epochs in the history of society. But against these things the Spirit has perpetual war. It was with a perfect knowledge of the likeliest besetments of His chosen that the Master gave His warning to His servants.⁷ The false excitement of a heedless and unthankful use of the Father’s temporal mercies, who provides in His long-suffering goodness for the unjust and the just alike, are an ever-present and too often a successful snare for those whose hearts are not pre-occupied with pleasures of another sort. Wine and unsanctified festivities are among the things which “take away the heart” of the idle and negligent confessor of the truth.⁸ Such things are of the night, and, therefore, to be no longer loved or sought after, but shunned rather by those who are the children of the day.⁹

Under the comprehensive phrase, “and such like,” with which the apostle closes his recital of things “manifest,” there lies an undetected ambush of other of those innumerable “fleshly lusts which war against

⁶ ἀνθρωποκτόνοι, 1 John iii. 15.

⁷ Luke xxi. 34.

⁸ Hosea iv. 11.

⁹ Rom. xiii. 13; 1 Thess. v. 5-8.

the soul," from which God's children are besought by the Spirit of grace, as strangers and pilgrims, to abstain.¹ These all have a common character, inasmuch as they all contradict the will of God, and are against the leading of the Spirit. The varieties of self-pleasing are as endless as the diversities of natural form and feature in mankind. Self-judgment is its counterpoise in the Father's husbandry of Christ. All things are lawful for them that are the heirs of all, but our anxious care should be to *rule*, and not obey, our natural inclinations. Else we cease to be freemen, and are slaves again. The apostle is our pattern in these things;² asserting emphatically his personal liberty, he preferred his bonds as the purchased possession of his Lord. All things were lawful, but right was not his measure. His faith wrought by *love*; and love considers not its rights, but rather its opportunities. What edified and was expedient, with reference to others not less than himself, and what became him as the bearer and witness of his Master's name, were the constant occupation of his thoughts. The incompatibility of a habit of carnal wilfulness and self-indulgence with a genuine faith in Christ, is everywhere insisted on by this fervent and unwearied preacher of the gospel of the grace of God. And we shall do wisely to remember, in these times of fast-increasing license, that grace systematically abused becomes a limited "long-suffering;" and that godless profession does but prepare more rapidly for "everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord" those "vessels of wrath," which now are standing on the false basis of a carnal security, and, like the

¹ 1 Peter ii. 11.

² 1 Cor. vi. 12

Scribes and Pharisees of old, are rejecting the counsel of God against themselves.³ The kingdom of God can be inherited by those only who are born of God, and who, therefore, not only rejoice in His goodness, but, spite of their natural selves, observe also and imitate His ways.

Verses 22, 23. "But the fruit of the Spirit is love," &c. To the hideous list of vices and evil propensities which prove the true character of "the flesh" we have now opposed, for our comfort and encouragement, a rich cluster of spiritual fruit. First, the distinctive names attached to the results of carnal and spiritual energies, respectively, are in noticeable harmony with the nature of the operative power in each case. They are *works* of the flesh, because wrought to their evil completeness by the carnal *will*. It is *fruit* of the Spirit, because borne by the regenerate believer as a branch of the true Vine, and the passive subject of the Father's husbandry. Branches which bear no fruit abide not in the day of judgment, but are dead already while they have a name to live. A faith that cleaves to what it lives on is a fruitful faith. *Much* fruit, and fruit that shall remain and abound to their account, in the day when reckoning is made, is borne by them that abide in Christ and He in them.⁴ *Discipleship*, to Him who has redeemed them for Himself, is the proper aim of the vessels of elective grace.⁵ To attain this, we must accept the positive tuition of the Spirit, who *leads* by *teaching*; both convincing and alluring our souls, as He takes the things of Christ and shows them to His

³ Luke vii. 30; Acts xx. 27; 1 John iii. 10.

⁴ John xv. 5; Phil. iv. 17.

⁵ John xv. 8, *seq.*

own. Taught thus by the Comforter to look upon divine glory in the face of Jesus Christ, and to recognize also all moral human loveliness in His most blessed Person, they are changed, while their hearts are so engaged, into the similitude of that on which they gaze.⁶

No exercised and self-judging believer can meditate the list of virtues here presented for our imitation without a mingled feeling of desire and despair. Conformity to Christ is the one aim of the spiritual mind; but flesh resists, and while it lasts will to the end resist, as we have seen. Yet fruit is a thing ordained of God for His elect. He is the God, not of the dead, but of the living, and Christ in us cannot be an altogether fruitless life. We are in Him, "created unto good works."⁷ He works in those whom He is guiding by His own strength unto His holy habitation. It is in the grateful gladness of our souls, as we keep sabbath with the living Father in the remembrance of Christ as the end in righteousness of all His thoughts of peace, that fruits of that righteousness are found in us, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.⁸ We attain our desire, as His servants, by abiding in that love of His which saved and serves ourselves. For what know we of true "*love*," but as it shines on us in Him; compelling forth from our dull hearts its true but feeble echo? And whence should "*joy*" come, or "*peace*" either, to a naturally guilty soul, if not through believing on Him of whom the Spirit speaks?⁹ And if "*long-suffering*" is to show

⁶ 2 Cor. iii. 18.

⁸ Phil. i. 11.

⁷ Eph. ii. 10.

⁹ Rom. xv. 13.

itself in us, whose old nature is so full of anger and debate, it can only be from having proved it first to be salvation to usward in the Lord.¹ If "*kindness*"² in its purity be an attribute of Christian men, what is it but the faintest reflection of that which from God has found its way to us in Jesus Christ; and having reached, and touched, and mastered our hearts, will also abide with us for ever?³ And what "*goodness*" can appear in us, in whom, that is in our flesh, there dwelleth no good thing; but as we taste, and love, and follow it in Him?⁴ "*Faith*" also, as a feature of spiritual character, and distinguished from that first and abiding gift of God which enables us to know and confess in truth that Jesus is the Lord, is the effect of our fellowship with Him whose name is Faithful, and who said of His Father, "I will put my trust in Him."⁵ We are faithful only while our hearts are fixed on Him who is the author and the finisher of faith.⁶ "*Meekness*"—true jewel in the sight of God, and rare, alas! as goodly jewels always are—is learnt on our parts by a close association with the meek and lowly One in heart:⁷ while "*temperance*," or self-restraint, too often a tardy and imperfect addition to our faith, is seen in its perfection in Him only who, with no evil passions to restrain, yet did not please Himself.⁸

"From Me is thy fruit found"⁹ is the Lord's prophetic testimony concerning Ephraim, whose fruit is yet to come. Meanwhile it is fulfilled in those

¹ 2 Peter iii. 15.

² χρηστότης. "*Gentleness*" is truly a fruit of the Spirit, but is better expressed by ἐπιείκεια, as in 2 Cor. x. 1.

³ Titus iii. 4; Eph. ii. 7.

⁴ 1 Peter iii. 13.

⁵ Heb. ii. 13.

⁶ Heb. xii. 2.

⁷ Matt. xi. 29.

⁸ Rom. xv. 3.

⁹ Hosea xiv. 8.

who out of His fulness have received grace for grace. The specifications of the Spirit's fruit are but separate traits of Jesus in His personal perfection. "Against such," the apostle says, "there is no law." For the law which was made for sinners is the approving witness of the Just One, who kept it hidden in His heart. He only had a full perception of its spiritual force and meaning; and as it was to the natural man for condemnation and dishonour, it was and is to Him for glory and for endless praise. He took it, and was subject to it; but it could not measure Him, nor fix the line of His obedience. His love to usward is more than a fulfilling of the law. For He loved His neighbour *better* than Himself when, after having fulfilled all living and natural righteousness, according to the truth and excellency of His person which made all He did divine as well as human, He gave Himself to death for our sins. It is He, then, who shewed forth perfection in our likeness and for us, whom the voice from heaven, which once spoke on earth to draw men's shaken and sin-stricken minds to consider the killing letter graven upon stones, now sets before us as the pattern of our way. It is as married unto Him that is risen from the dead that we bring forth fruit unto God.¹

The Galatians had once begun to bear this fruit. While they continued in the faith and love of Christ, they walked in light and morally resembled Him of whom and of whose blessedness they spake. But when forgetting *His* commandment, and hearkening to other words, they sought from the Master to the servant, and from the living to the dead,² their first-

¹ Rom. vii. 4.

² John xv. 9, 10; Joshua i. 2.

fruit withered as before a drying wind, and what once was pleasant turned to gall and bitterness.³ To bring back their stunted and impoverished souls into the warm sunshine of the gospel, and turn again the barren wilderness of self-seeking into the true and fragrant garden of the Lord, is the apostle's earnest aim in this epistle. For such fruit as he has been describing is the natural growth of grace only; and they were by their calling under grace, not under law. And of this he again reminds them in what follows.

Verse 24. "Now they that are Christ's have crucified⁴ the flesh with its affections and its lusts." It is of much importance to note carefully the language of the Spirit in this place, because "crucifixion of the flesh" is often wrongly confounded with that practical mortifying of the deeds of the body to which believers are exhorted, as themselves alive to God through faith in their risen and ever-living Lord. But here he is not exhorting, but teaching and putting in remembrance. He speaks not of what they *ought* to do, but of what, unless their faith is vain, they *did*. "They who are Christ's *crucified*," he says, the flesh and its belongings. Now if we ask, when was this done and how? the true answer is, not when Christ personally died, but when they made by faith a saving confession of His name, through a knowledge of the grace of God in truth. For it is Christ crucified of whom the gospel speaks. If therefore believers know what they say and understand what they affirm, they confess that when Christ died for them, they died also as to their old and sinful selves. For He suffered

³ *Ante*, verse 15.

⁴ More exactly "crucified," or "did crucify," *ἐσταύρωσαν*.

in their stead; and when awakened to a consciousness of this amazing truth, and enabled, by the grace of Him who calls them, to believe in their hearts unto righteousness, and make confession unto salvation,⁵ they do, by their confession, place themselves beside Him on the cross, and thenceforth live *truly* only by the faith of Him.

Crucifixion of the flesh is thus “a work of faith” rather than “a labour of love.” It is, for all God’s elect, a solemn and eternal truth in Christ; we appropriate it, when by faith we make His suffering in the flesh our own. It is in this sense only that believers are said in Scripture to have “ceased from sin,” and in adoring contemplation of the reality of His atoning death are exhorted by the Spirit to arm themselves with the *same mind*.⁶ Against his inner consciousness, which reports loudly and distinctly that the flesh still lives and lusts, the believer is encouraged to array *the truth*, as it stands eternally recorded in the Cross. “*Faith*,” in its persevering tenacity of purpose, is the first of the three forms of spiritual fruit by which the vitality of a tree of righteousness may at any time be ascertained. The other two are “hope” and “charity.”⁷ By faith we stand, and through faith we recover our footing after we have slipped. If through unwariness we are spoiled for a season, as these inconsiderate Galatians were, of our true strength and glory, to recover both we must repent and turn to Him whom we have left, and learn to do again the former works.⁸ From *self*, with its vanities and miseries, to *Christ* in His un-

⁵ Rom. x. 10.

⁶ 1 Peter iv. 1.

⁷ 1 Thess. i. 3; 1 Cor. xiii. 13.

⁸ Rev. ii. 5.

changing grace and blessedness, is the Spirit's path of restoration always. To do battle successfully against the world, the flesh, and the devil, we must stand on a ground distinct from and above them all, and this is only found *in Christ*. The Comforter lifts up that Name, and gives it to His people as a banner to be fearlessly displayed *because of the truth*.⁹ Our fallen nature is not in the truth, nor of the truth. Faith seeks it, finds it, worships it, and rests on it, in *Jesus Christ*.

Verse 25. "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit." This "if" suggests no doubt, for they who answer to the call of God are quickened by His word, and live both in and by the Spirit. If otherwise, we are dead still in our natural selves. The apostle's exhortation is here, as always, grounded on a state assumed. None but Christians can be justly invited to a Christian walk, since a man's behaviour is, or ought to be, a proof of what he is. According to the confidence which the apostle has in his erring brethren through the Lord, he treats them as really in the faith, and exhorts them accordingly as partners of his own confidence and rejoicing in Christ Jesus. Let us keep, he says, the order¹ of the Spirit, if we live in Him. We once walked in a path of our own, when alienated in our ignorance from the life of God; let our ways now be according to the light in which we live. The true character of a spiritual walk may be estimated by the reproach of the same apostle to the Corinthians. They walked as *men*. We must have new and higher motives, and be sustained by a mightier power than our own free will, if we are to

⁹ Psalm lx. 4.

¹ στοιχῶμεν.

keep blamelessly the way of God. We walk as we are *led*. If we forget that we are not our own but Christ's, we shall of course be led by the deceiver in the ways of sin. If we keep in memory what we have heard, we shall, in the newness of the Spirit, care only to please Him who has redeemed us for Himself.

Verse 26. "Let us not be desirous of vain-glory," &c. Such a spirit would be totally opposed to the grace of our calling in Christ. But law-seekers are, as it were, naturally animated by this evil and vain wish; for to be something on their own account is the very end and aim of all their striving. Men think, while in a legal spirit, that they "have whereof they may trust in the flesh."² A justifying and soul-purifying faith, on the other hand, has neither heart nor leisure for such false imaginations and pursuits. Engaged with Christ, and dominated by the truth on which it lives, its thoughts towards others are in sympathy with the love which is its own continued confidence and joy.³ Positive precepts are therefore comparatively needless, when the temper of the soul is right. God's commandment is exceedingly broad, and the Spirit's way of teaching is to set before our hearts a model for their study and imitation, not less than for their consolation and delight, as He bears continued witness to the Lord. We learn Christ by observing *Him*. Particular prohibitions and injunctions are provided on the part of God, who knows us altogether; and has given His inspired word for doctrine, for correction and reproof, as well as for instruction in righteousness;⁴ for all these things are needed for the strength and guidance of His children

² Phil. iii. 4. ³ John xiii. 34; Heb. iii. 6. ⁴ 2 Tim. iii. 16.

in the way of peace. But we are not like our fathers, under statute law, with penalties attached.⁵

General principles of conduct are laid down which, when heartily observed in the spirit of reverence and godly fear, secure also a right behaviour in detail. When the Lord speaks comprehensively, as a moral teacher to His people, He says—"I am meek and lowly, learn of me." So also here. When the brightness of the true glory shames and kills the desire of false glory, envy and provocation are likewise at an end. Circumcision boasts itself no longer vainly against uncircumcision; nor does the uncircumcised believer, while he walks in the newness of true spiritual liberty, despise the scruples of another, who keeps days and seasons to the Lord. None judges his brother in *that* Presence. God's kingdom is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. Heart-service, rendered in the garment of humility, is alone, and at all times, well-pleasing to the Lord. External comeliness, if not a fruit of spiritual grace, is mere hypocrisy, a cloak of the maliciousness which lurks within, drawing abhorrence and not approbation from the Searcher of our hearts and reins. All true ambition takes a downward path in search of its desire. For the Lord is among His chosen as a servant, in His grace; and if we wish to share His honour, we must learn to imitate His ways.⁶

⁵ Yet, true as this is, it is most needful to remember also that God's house is evermore the place of righteousness. The Father *judges*, and the Son is *Ruler* in the house which He is building. He will judge us if we do not judge ourselves. (1 Pet. i. 17; iv. 17; 1 Cor. xi. 31, 32.)

⁶ John xii. 26.

CHAPTER VI.

VERSE 1. "Brethren, if even a man be overtaken in any trespass (or offence),¹ ye which are spiritual, restore such an one," &c. The word "brethren," which begins this final chapter, belongs also, in the spirit of its meaning, to what goes before. For among them that are such there should be found no rivalries, and when true brotherly love abounds neither provocations nor envyings exist. Let us note also the special force of its bearing on the immediate subject of this verse. To the faith which puts us on a common footing in the Father's house, there should be added, not brotherly kindness only, but the charity which thinks no evil; and when evil by its own effrontery discovers itself, makes haste to heal and hide it: first, by its faithful probing, and then by restoring the delinquent in the meekness and gentleness of Christ.² The breadth of the apostle's language is remarkable. The offender is "a man;" the offence or fault is of any kind. We, who as men in our natural state were once *dead* in trespasses and sins, are to remember that we still are men, and with like passions as before, though in another state. Offences, moreover, are of two kinds: against God only, or against Him and our neighbour also. The former shall be further noticed presently; with

¹ ἐν τινι παραπτώματι.² 1 Peter iv. 8; 2 Peter i. 7.

respect to the latter, we do well to remember that although, for Christ's sake, *all* trespasses are forgiven to the true believer, yet so essential a quality of the new nature is a forgiving spirit, that God's great amnesty will be no amnesty, but rather double condemnation, to them that, with the doctrine of free grace in their minds and memories, prove the falsehood of their claim to be God's children, by refusing to each other the forgiveness we receive from Him.³

Let us next observe the force of the word "spiritual." So long as the Galatians were tampering with law, such an exercise of restorative grace as is here prescribed would have been contradictory and impossible. For the law proves sin, but does not cover it. But he writes out of the confidence which he has in them through the Lord; addressing them as brethren, and anticipating a fulfilment of his earnest striving and desire that Christ should again be formed in them.⁴ He exhorts them therefore according to their proper character as men in Christ.⁵ There is besides a relative, and more limited and special force in the present application of this term. All are to be disposed in heart to acts of sympathetic love; but among real disciples there are measures and degrees of grace. Let those then, who seemed most endowed with spiritual gifts, be the prominent and willing agents also in this exercise of sympathetic charity.⁶

It is necessary also to compare the motive here suggested for a ready practising of brotherly kindness in this form, with that other and higher motive which makes those who rightly regard the majesty

³ Matt. xviii. 35.

⁴ *Ante*, chap. iv. 19.

⁵ Rom. viii. 9.

⁶ *Conf.* 1 Cor. xiv. 37.

of the Lord, the purity and honour of the name by which they are called, and the holiness which becomes the house of God, refuse to countenance in their assembly known but unacknowledged wrong of any kind.⁷ Intolerance of evil will ever accompany a zeal for God that is according to knowledge, and carries with it the sure sympathy of Him who walks among the candlesticks;⁸ but if the discipline of His house is to be maintained after His own mind, faithfulness and integrity of purpose must be associated with both bowels of mercy and self-distrust. We are to consider *Him*; we are to consider also *ourselves*, as one in natural liability to fall with the person who has been vanquished for a season by the tempter. The whole of this epistle is an extended illustration of the precept here enjoined. Paul had “considered himself,” when he uttered with such boldness his unsparing malediction against the perverters of the gospel of Christ, and his strongest censure of his erring brethren was dictated by his deep sense of their exposure to a danger from which none are free. If his words are sharp, the meekness and tender love of Christ were in his heart. A disregard of the warning here expressed infallibly exposes the high-minded Christian to the very danger from which he thinks himself exempt.⁹ In all true disciplinary action, it is *God* who judges by His word. In the spirit of simple obedience and withal of fellowship, as children of the light, with Him whose true children are begotten in His likeness, we are bound equally to reject impenitent offenders, and to comfort

⁷ 1 Cor. v. 6, 7; 2 Cor. vii. 11. ⁸ Rev. ii. 2.

⁹ Matt. vii. 42; Rom. ii. 1.

them that acknowledge and bewail their faults. To give further emphasis to his counsel, the apostle declares his personal warning not *generally*, as he does his charge to restore the offender, but to each separate heart and conscience in the sight of God, "*considering thyself.*"

Verse 2. "Bear ye one another's burdens,¹ and so fulfil the law of Christ." They had desired to be under law, in ignorance of the real nature of their wish; and now, having dispelled this ignorance by a fresh infusion of pure gospel light into their souls, he proceeds to show them a more excellent way. The law which was given by Moses laid burdens upon men, and left them there, until removed by the grace and truth which came by Jesus Christ. But the looser of burdens, and the liberator of the oppressed, is a law also to His own disciples. But how unlike all other laws! On his own part he expects only that we bear the honourable burden of His cross. The energy of our love and devotedness to Him is to be expended, if we wish to please Him, not upon Himself, but *His*. If we would serve Him, we must follow Him;² and His walk was, from its beginning to its sacrificial end, from love to love.³

There is a tender but forceful irony in this verse. To bear weights is the service not of babes but men; and the Galatians, he insinuates, must have felt themselves strong when they offered to accept the weighty charge of legal responsibility. Let them now give their shoulder to a worthier and nobler burden.⁴ The new commandment is to love one another, *as* Christ

¹ "Weights," βάρος.

² John xii. 26.

³ Eph. v. 2; 1 John iv. 11.

⁴ Rom. xv. 1.

loved us all. Now the manner of His love was Himself to take our burden, and let us go free; and to imitate Him in this work of love is the joy and honour of the disciple who would be, in life and habit, as his Master. We cannot bear indeed each other's *sins*, nor is there room on our parts for such a wish, as He has borne them all for us in His own body on the tree; but all burdens which the hand of human sympathy can touch are the proper charge for faith to carry in the arms of love. Of Jesus it is written that Himself took our infirmities, and bore our sicknesses. To be afflicted with the afflictions of His people had been His gracious habit from of old.⁵ And if in the fulness of His marvellous and all-surpassing mercy and loving-kindness He calls those friends, nay even brethren, who naturally were His deadly enemies, it is to give them an occasion of proving their devotion to Him whom they confess to be their Lord, by regarding one another in His love, as He regarded and does still regard themselves. His kindness to usward is for ever, in the natural flow of His exhaustless grace; our exercise of mutual affection is, for the short day of mortality, a *duty* for His sake; to be continued, in another sort, when *glory* is the only and eternal weight which all will bear who now follow where the Master leads.⁶

Verse 3. "For if any one think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself." To bear another's burdens is a proof not of strength only, but of kindness also and lowliness of mind. For while men think highly of themselves they cannot

⁵ Matt. viii. 1, 7; Isaiah lxiii. 9.

⁶ 2 Cor. iv. 17; Rom. viii. 17.

truly *serve*, although the forms of service may be shown. Christ was naturally meek and lowly; we are naturally proud and foolish. Grace withers pride to the dust and ashes of repentance by the power of the cross; and out of his own nothingness the true believer rises into Christ, to be strong in Him and in the power of His might. The chief danger, to such as have received the truth in the love of it, is that of thinking something, not of their old nature, which they know to be worthless and condemned, but of their *Christian* selves. It is a refinement of the adversary's craft to maintain old sins under an altered guise. But a believer, if he judges rightly, has no separate self to think of. He died with Christ. What then remains of him? He crucified his flesh, as we have seen,⁷ with its affections and its lusts. Will he revive these and be himself again? Nay, "not I but Christ" must be the language of his heart, if living and walking in the Spirit. What he is, as a follower of his Master, is, as Paul tells us in his own case, *by the grace of God*. Let each then think soberly, according to the measure of faith which God has dealt to each. To estimate himself as anything is to reckon wrongly and deceive himself. It is a derogation from his Saviour's glory and a practical refusal of His cross. But the Galatians must have thought themselves something when they meditated circumcision and subjection to the law. True faith, in Paul, or David, or Moses, or any other saint, says, "Who am I?" And if this has ever been the spirit of God's elect from the beginning, when the promise was a far-off thing, and the means of its fulfilment

⁷ *Ante*, page 289.

indistinctly seen, how much more heartily, and as it were *naturally*, should it be in our hearts and life, before whose eyes the Lord they looked for has been evidently set forth crucified? Let, then, the life which is our own in Christ only, and by faith, have its proper exercise, and be governed and regulated by its proper law. To think anything *beneath* us, which is worthy of love's strength, is a thought of foolishness, and therefore sin. We are right only while our eye is single, and our hearts enlarged to the breadth of that commandment which redeeming love has laid upon its objects. It is the joy and peace of every one whose ear is bowed down to receive the Father's wisdom,⁸ to confess that He is nothing, and that Christ is all.

Verse 4. "But let each prove his own work, and then shall he have matter of boasting with reference to himself alone, and not with reference to others."⁹ Such is the rule of service and reward for those who stand by faith, and are personally sanctified in Christ. In the matter of justification, boasting of all kinds is excluded. Abraham, the father of the faithful, has nothing to boast of or rejoice in before God, save the grace which made him what he was.¹ But our question here is not justification, but the walk and conduct of the justified. Personally nothing, the believer yet has work which he may call *his own*. In this, as in so many other instances, gospel truth is a natural paradox. The intention of this verse seems to be to guard us against a false inference from what goes before.

⁸ Prov. v. 1.

⁹ εἰς ἑαυτὸν μόνον τὸ καύχημα ἔξει, καὶ οὐκ εἰς τὸν ἕτερον.

¹ Rom. iv. 2.

The believer is *nothing*. How then can he work? Such is an easy suggestion of the deceitful and ease-loving heart, with idleness and unfruitfulness as its natural result. But faith is an operative thing, or it is *dead*. It cannot, if real, be separate from love; and love denies its very nature, if inert and regardless of its object. The believer is called indeed to liberty, and in comparison with the state of a legal bondman is in some sort at his own discretion; yet he is subject, spirit, soul, and body, by the necessary law of life and truth, to Christ. We are servants in our sonship, and have a Lord and Master, not less than a Saviour and a Father. Of ourselves as *Christians* we must give account. As sinners, we have given account already, and received in the rich grace of our Redeemer double for our sins. But a day is coming which will try by fire not *us*, but our *work*.² Our *faith* is tried now; our work is to be proved hereafter. But in anticipation of that day we are exhorted here to prove our own work in the spirit of self-judgment, and of a faith which disengages itself from all other objects, that its works may be wrought in God. Let each believer, then, examine and consider well both what he positively puts his hand to, and what he sanctions or allows. And that he may do this effectually, let him not follow the footsteps of the Lord's companions only, but, imitating their faith, become an immediate follower of the Lord Himself.³ What he sees others do he should consider, but not necessarily do the same. To his own Master he must stand or fall.

To plead as a reason for actions, good or bad, that

² 1 Cor. iii. 13.

³ Cant. i. 7; viii. 13.

others of a fair repute, and who called on the same great Name, have done them, will not be held sufficient in that day, and should not be accepted by us now. Who hath required this? By what motive am I governed? Am I aiming at consistency (often no better than a subtle form of self-complacency or man-pleasing), or am I sincerely studying the pleasure of the Lord? These and like questions will be put often to his own soul by the wise-hearted believer, with reference to what he purposes and does. Do you see other men acting in a manner that seems right and enviable? Let it stir in your hearts a kindred desire towards *God*. What results, as the fruit of devoted obedience, will then be truly *yours*; “for God is not unrighteous to forget your work, and the love which ye have showed toward His name.”⁴ To be rich toward God is to lay up uncorrupted treasure for ourselves. A secret faith with Him is both the regulator of our liberty and the spring of all true service in His sight.⁵ Another man’s line of things is not our own, nor can be; but his diligence may abound indirectly to our account, by exciting a corresponding zeal and willingness of mind in us. The sort of rejoicing here spoken of is exemplified abundantly in Paul himself. He had a glorying, which he would not suffer any to make void.⁶ His conscience bore him witness, though his work awaits the final decision of the Lord. Meanwhile he was always confident, and boasted loudly of what God had wrought by him. It was his singleness of aim,

⁴ Heb. vi. 10. S.V. A. omit τοῦ κόπου in this verse.

⁵ Rom. xiv. 22; Mark xi. 22; Heb. xi. *passim*.

⁶ 1 Cor. ix. 15.

as one to whom to live was Christ, that made such boasting not the wearisome prattle of an offensive egotism, but a truthful and natural expression of his inner joy. His egotism is the praise of God, who made him what he was. "Well done," will be said in that day to all who have truly occupied in any way for *Christ*, in the spirit not of will-worship, but obedience; and it is always in our own power, if our hearts are right, to judge the aim and object of our work.

Verse 5. "For each shall bear his own burden."⁷ A truth of present and eternal force. We may carry what we will, and it will always be our own. Our choice may be wise or foolish, and with a corresponding end. Christ's burden is light in the carrying, and receives a crown of righteousness as its reward. But we may lade ourselves with weights that we should rather throw aside, to our present injury and final and great loss. The cares which belong to us as men are not the burdens which we ought to bear as saints. The Lord expects us to cast *them* on Him. What we bear as Christians we should receive first at His hands. A charge is committed to each saint of God, according to the measure of the grace bestowed. Are we conscious of a talent or ability of any kind? Let us take care not to bestow it on ourselves, but devote it to the satisfying of a higher claim. We must bear each his appointed charge, but we may do this grudgingly or willingly. True burdens also may be shunned, and false ones taken in their place. The man who endures willingly the afflic-

⁷ φορτίον, a load of any kind, voluntary or involuntary, heavy or light.

tions of the Gospel, according to the power of God, and finds his joy in bearing the reproach of Christ, will find that welcome though onerous burden change to an eternal weight of glory in the day of His appearing.⁸ If, on the other hand, instead of the burden which Christ offers to us, we accept a charge from merely human hands, applying our faculties and energies to things which are not now the objects of the Spirit's care, we may obtain peradventure praise and honour among men, as supposed benefactors of the world; but it is written for our warning, that the things most esteemed among men are abominations in the sight of God. For His Spirit is not, as so many would persuade themselves, preparing a willing world to own and rejoice in its Redeemer, but separating the elect vessels of His mercy by a word which makes them strangers to their natural selves. Humanitarian earnestness is not the zeal of God's house. The world is not of the Father, nor its things. Its kingdoms are not yet become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, nor will be until by the brightness of His personal appearing He destroys the last of the many false pretenders to His throne.⁹ The Master is still gathering and bearing; and if we gather not with Him, we are but scattering abroad.¹

Verse 6. "But let him that is taught in the word communicate," &c.² Each has to bear his burden and to prove his work. But the teacher's charge is of a nature that, for its worthy fulfilment, demands a freedom from distraction which the love of others is intended to secure. This verse is a word of remem-

⁸ 2 Cor. iv. 17.

⁹ 2 Thess. ii. 8; Rev. xi. 15.

¹ Matt. xii. 30.

² κοινωνεῖτω δὲ ὁ κ.

brance of which a fresh love has no need,³ but which turns too often to a reproachful testimony against the self-seeking thoughtlessness of those who, engrossed by other and less worthy interests, are disregarding their better opportunities of winning blessing for themselves.⁴ That a teacher should wait upon his teaching is the known will of the Lord.⁵ That practical gratitude should prove itself on the part of those who love and profit by the pasture of the Lord's providing, might seem to be only in the natural course of things, had not the recorded history of Christianity proved the contrary. Always of rare occurrence, even when Christians were *only* Christians,⁶ and no breaches yet existed in the house which professedly is God's, this precept has commonly been not only shamed by a positive neglect, but even more dishonoured by a perverted and mischievous observance. False teachers "took," without difficulty, of the Corinthians;⁷ and to make merchandise of the simple with feigned words has ever been the habit of those corrupters of the Word of God for whom His judgment is ordained.⁸ We are ourselves living in those days in which, among other tokens of the general ascendancy of the will of man in the ordering of the things of God, men heap *to themselves* teachers having itching ears. The vendor of divers and strange doctrines finds a too ready sale for his pernicious wares, while the ox that treadeth out the corn goes muzzled still. Variations from the truth are welcomed, in truth's name, as heartily by modern

³ Acts xvi. 15; Phil. iv. 15.

⁴ Phil. ii. 21; Acts xx. 35. ⁵ Rom. xii. 7. ⁶ Phil. iv. 15, 17.

⁷ 2 Cor. xi. 20. ⁸ 2 Cor. ii. 17; 2 Peter ii. 3.

professors as by the Galatians of old, but with more destructive consequences, as there is no living apostle to address them; and the written Word is fast becoming, among those who yield themselves to the guidance not of the Spirit of truth but of "the spirit of the age," a subject of debate rather than God's living and commanding voice. But if the true preacher of the Word is too frequently rewarded by unheeding ears and thankless hearts, God has His remnant still, according to the election of His grace; and the wise of heart shall hear and understand.⁸

Verses 7, 8. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap," &c. The frequency of the Spirit's warnings against deception, both of ourselves and as the dupes of Satan's emissaries, is truly remarkable, and should be taken well to heart. One thing at least is certain: God is not mocked. Though once utterly derided by the wise and prudent of this world in the person of His Son, God cannot be permanently set at nought. He is a God of knowledge, and by Him actions are weighed, with results to be declared openly in due time. For He will mete to every man according to his work. Moreover, in the counsels of His wisdom, men are themselves their own judges and the requiters of themselves. What men sow they must inevitably also reap, sparingly or bountifully, grief or joy, according to the manner of their husbandry. If, like the apostle, they go forth weeping, bearing precious seed, and sow beside all waters in the spirit of unflagging faith and love, they will reap fruit to life eternal at the coming day. No kind of labour

⁸ 2 Tim. iv. 2-4; Dan. xii. 10.

in the Lord is vain, and the life here below is our sole opportunity of winning or losing in the things of God. We may sow to our flesh, seeking with an ill-bestowed diligence *our own*, with corruption for our harvest. Labouring only for the meat that perishes, and careful overmuch about the things of time, we shall find that not only is the labour lost which we bestow on vanity, but with it also the precious occasion of true spiritual gain. To regard what men call their own interests, and regulate our course of life with a chief reference to these, is wisdom and prudence in the estimation of the world, but folly and wasting in the sight of God. We lose our life by seeking it; we find it when we lose it for Christ's sake. To seek first God's kingdom and His righteousness is to secure for ourselves a double blessing; since godliness has promise both of this life and of that which is to come.⁹ To perform grudgingly, and without the warmth of love, such duties only as are felt by the conscience to be necessary to its peace, is still to be sowing to our flesh. God owns no other work than that of faith, and accepts no motive of His children's acts but love.

We may sow to our flesh in a religious as well as in a secular sense. The Galatians were doing so while desiring to be under law. But in its commoner intention, it is a general expression for all plans or purposes which expect results only in this present life. To live here for the morrow is the instinct of our old nature, which in the midst whether of toil or pleasure is still hoping for an increase of the fruits which gratify its own foolish and hurtful lusts.

⁹ Matt. vi. 33; 1 Tim. iv. 8.

Sowing to the Spirit is impossible without a corresponding denial of the flesh, since these things are contraries ; and to seek God's things we must begin by letting go our own. But the main point of this passage concerns the right or wrong disposal of that which is already in our hands. Our time, our strength, our money, our faculty or means, must be devoted to *some* uses, good or bad. The soul that lives consciously beneath the Father's eye will pass the time of its sojourning here with fear, as well as in abiding peace and joy.¹ It is, above all, important to remember that unreal piety is a thing even more offensive to God than spiritual slothfulness. His eye is on every heart, and He observes and notes the difference between a sleeping and a waking saint. But that He is not *mocked* is the emphatic declaration here, an expression which applies with equal propriety to a positive contempt of His commandment, or to an insincere though apparent observance of His will. Scoffers will find this to be true, when the hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him will awake at last the slumbering vengeance of the Lord. False and empty lip-service will be also silenced and condemned, in the presence of Him who comes to put a final difference between them that truly serve Him, and such as, with His name and praises in their mouth, still give their hearts to that which He abhors. The value also of the work of His true servants will be searched and found by the same burning ordeal of His presence. What need, then, on all our parts, of thoughtfulness and sobriety of mind, of reverential fear and self-distrust, of cir-

¹ 1 Peter i. 17.

cumspection and humility, of simplicity and godly sincerity, of meekness and poverty of spirit, that the work of our hands may be prospered on ourselves, and cause us neither shame nor loss in the surely and soon-coming day of recompences !

Lastly, it should be noticed also that the particular gifts and rewards of which the Master speaks, as in store for them that overcome, are here summed in the single term of "life everlasting," while "corruption" is the declared end of sowing to our flesh. The Spirit is life; the flesh ends in corruption, a word which has in Scripture, besides its natural meaning, a moral and a penal force. Corruption is in the world through lust; and of the false teachers of the last times, and their disciples, it is said that they shall utterly perish in their own corruption, receiving thus the reward of unrighteousness.² God's house and temple is His Church; and them that defile that temple He will utterly destroy.³ The inference from this is, that while true believers are principally before the mind of the apostle, his words, both here and in another passage of a similar import,⁴ are meant to bear a wider application. Nor let it seem strange to any that real Christians should be admonished in such terms. They who are truly

² 2 Peter ii. 12, 13.

³ 1 Cor. iii. 17. Destruction is treated in Scripture with reference sometimes to the will and power of the destroyer, and sometimes, as in this instance, to its effect upon its subject. The believer's body is sown in corruption, to be afterwards raised in incorruption. But when applied penally to the corrupter of God's grace, it has reference to the abiding condition of the second death. The moral corruption of sin, when its pleasures are exhausted and its pains begin, is a chief part of the eternal punishment of those who now neglect God's great salvation. ⁴ 2 Cor. v. 10, 11.

Christ's may provoke as well as please Him;⁵ and we shall find in that day, if we doubt it now, that He is the Searcher of the reins and hearts, and that He will give to each of us according to our works.⁶

Verse 9. "And let us not be weary in well-doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not." Having faithfully declared the opposite ends of a carnal and a spiritual life, he returns now, in the spirit of a sympathetic fellowship, to look upon the burdens of his brethren and to cheer them, as himself a partner in their lot. He will not think of them as evil-doers and sowers to their flesh, but as truly running with himself the race of life. They had begun well, had been interrupted and diverted from their course, and now they are again facing the true Object of their calling, and resuming, as he trusted, the proper weight of their confession as namers of the Name of Christ. But we have need of patience, that after we have done the will of God we may receive the promise; and that patience is to be acquired partly by listening to the Spirit's witness of our forerunners in the race, but above all by considering Him who endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself.⁷ The harvest is sure at its appointed season; and although to the weakness of our flesh the time seems long, yet in faith's language it is *short*. In a little, yea, a very little time, and He that shall come will come, and no longer tarry.⁸ And until He come, to occupy in hope for Him is our charge; not fainting, or doubting, or speculating on the times and seasons, but continuing in prayer

⁵ 1 Cor. x. 22.

⁶ Rev. ii. 23.

⁷ Heb. x. 36; xii. 1-4.

⁸ Heb. x. 37.

and watching thereunto with thanksgiving. Discouragements must be encountered, for these are among the intended trials of our faith. That Paul might comfort others, he must first himself be comforted of God.⁹ Christ's fellow-heirs are called to suffer in His name. Let not, then, these erring but restored Galatians be staggered or confounded at the past, but gird up their loins and hope on, in well-doing, to the end. If they kept good heart, their strength would be even as their day,¹ through the unfailing grace of Him who is Himself the originator and completer of their faith. In His *own* time,² which should be ours also, we shall reap, if steadfast and unmoved. We shall reap our final and full harvest when we ourselves have first been reaped from earth.³ Glory, honour, and incorruption are the objects of their search who, by patient continuance in well-doing, follow Jesus in the way, and eternal life will be the abundant realization of their expectation in the coming day.⁴ A night of toil must be a night of trial, and of anxious endurance also, but that night already is far spent. Salvation is nearer to an expectant saint than to a newly-awakening sinner. As children of the light and of the day, our garments should be as our hope.⁵ Moreover, the end of all things is at hand. At midnight, or at cock-crowing, the Lord may come. Let our anxiety be,

⁹ 2 Cor. i. 4.

¹ Such seems to be the distinction of meaning between the two words used in this verse, both which are commonly translated "faint;" *μὴ ἐκκαῶμεν*, "let us not lose heart" . . . *μὴ ἐκλυόμενοι*, "not giving in," through lack of strength.

² *καὶ ὅτε ἰδῇς*.

³ Rev. xiv. 16.

⁴ Rom. ii. 7.

⁵ Rom. xiii. 12-14; 1 Thess. v. 4-8.

then, to be found of Him in peace, without spot and blameless, at His coming; waiting contentedly while He is pleased to tarry at the Father's will,⁶ and ready to go in with Him when the set time of the wedding has arrived.

Verse 10. "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good to all," &c. What "well-doing" is in its external sense is set forth for us plainly here. There can be no limit to the love which is of God, and Christian well-doing is an imitation of Himself. As Christ went about doing good while here below, according to the fulness of His personal sufficiency and grace, yet doing all things at the will and by the power of the Father who had sent Him, so they that follow Him are taught to regard themselves as debtors, for His name's sake, in the bond of kindness unto all. If true children of the Father, we shall not only cherish and exhibit the natural sympathy of kind, but shall imitate Him also in the patient actings of His long-suffering and grace. Let it never be forgotten that love's service is, in its proper character, a *sacrifice*. Natural benevolence pleases itself, and works within its limits at its own discretion. What the world calls "good-nature" or "goodness of heart" is not the love which is of God. Faith delights in God, and in His ways, and thus forgets itself; or if remembered, self is remembered only to be denied in the better remembrance of His costly and unsparing love to us. We do good to Him when, to please Him, we are kind to those whom He has made.⁷

With such sacrifices God is pleased.⁸ As we have

⁶ Acts i. 7.

⁷ Matt. v. 44-48.

⁸ Heb. xiii. 16.

received, we are expected also to bestow freely, for His name's sake, upon enemies as well as friends. For our lives and actions here are worse than useless, if they do not lead other men to think of Him. "The kindness and philanthropy of God our Saviour"⁹ is to be commended by us, not by word only, but much more in our ways among our fellow-men. His witnesses we are so long (and no longer) as we are reflecting Him in our lives. Let us beware also of narrowing this precept in its interpretation. To do good is in the power of every real Christian, though not always in the same manner. A penniless believer, rich in faith and love, may be a greater blessing to his generation than the largest benefactor in a material sense only. "Such as I have give I thee," is an apostolic example of the manner and spirit in which this general exhortation may be honoured.¹ Miraculous power adds no strength to kindness. Its true effect is only to turn more forcibly the gratitude of the recipient towards the Source of all true kindness. Power or no power, of His *grace* have all we who believe received; and a cup of cold water, or a cheering word in season, is not less precious in the Master's eyes than the moving of a mountain in His name. Opportunity is to be sought, not idly waited for. Life with its sorrowful necessities abounds in such, nay rather is itself our ready but fast-escaping vantage time.²

But we must not overlook the *order* of this comprehensive charge. *All* human need is a provocation of true Christian sympathy and kindness, but God's children have a paramount though not exclusive claim. "His brother whom he hath seen" is the

⁹ Titus iii. 4. ¹ Acts iii. 6. ² John ix. 4; Eccles. ix. 10.

appointed receiver, upon God's behalf, of the love which any one professes towards Him that is invisible.³ It is of first importance that this difference should be observed on our parts, since without it natural humanitarian sentiment may easily usurp the place and name of that love which is of God. As the Samaritan in the parable was a stranger to the object of his pitying care, so God's saints while on their pilgrim journey should neglect no opportunity of ministering to the dwellers upon earth; but it is *Christ*, in the suffering members of His body, who is the great Creditor of our charity as Christians. We own Him in owning them. We do good to Him in ministering, not words of love, but acts of kindness to His people, for no other reason than that they are His.⁴ Kindness excites affection in the form of gratitude, in every renovated heart, not to the immediate benefactor only, but much more to Him in whose name the love which is of God delights to act. And it is by this positive exercise of love to one another that the world is to know and distinguish Christ's disciples from itself.⁵ How different is this holy sentiment of love and its activities from the spurious principle of "duty to society," which too often is substituted for it! *A believer has no duties foreign to his calling*, and his calling is not an earthly, but a heavenly calling. He is therefore in a totally false position when associated with men of the world for objects of social or political interest. But confessors of Christ's Name began early to forget their true calling, and cease to seek a knowledge of the power of Christ's resurrection,⁶

³ 1 John iv. 20.

⁴ 1 John iii. 18.

⁵ 1 John xiii. 35.

⁶ Phil. iii. 10.

as the efficient principle of their walk as heirs of His kingdom, in separation from the world out of which they were redeemed. Old things and new became confounded, and the effect of this false amalgam has been the production of the so-called "Christian world," a designation just indeed and faithful as to what it represents, but which publishes emphatically its own condemnation. For a Christian is no more of the world than Christ is of the world,⁷ nor can the world and the Father be at one until the time of regeneration has arrived. Great Babylon is built upon this compromise of truth; and while any of Christ's people linger in her they are her bondmen, and the servants of her pride. To come out of her is still the Spirit's call. Sympathy is due from man to man, and kindness for Christ's sake should be shown to all who are in need. But *fellowship* can truly be where parity of calling and of hope, yea of name, moreover, and of nature, is the basis of association. The household of faith are the household of *God*, and should be known as such to all its members, and, antagonistically, also to the world. It is to the general neglect of this law of Christian Nazariteship, and the want of practical cohesion among those who really are of God, that most of the spiritual dangers and perplexities are owing, which make our own day a time of shame and grief, as well as of longing hope, to every spiritual mind.

Verse 11. "Ye see how large a letter I have written unto you with my own hand."⁸ We have here a fresh and highly characteristic trait of the apostle's

⁷ John xvii. 16.

⁸ More literally: "Behold with what large letters," &c.

paternal yearnings toward his children in the faith. His habit was to write with his own hand the salutations only in his epistles to the Churches; but to the Galatians he addresses an autograph letter. Nor does he associate any other individual name with his own when writing in a tone of more vehement reproof and expostulation, as well as of more earnest and anxious tenderness, than we find him using on any other occasion with reference to Christians.⁹ His letter was brief in measure, but in matter weighty indeed, and his very mode of writing, in a larger and more careful hand than seems to have been usual with him, bore additional witness to the anxiety he felt that his words should be used by them with a corresponding earnestness of heed. He acted in this respect quite naturally. When we wish to emphasise in a high degree a passage in a modern book or letter, our common habit is to have recourse to capitals. When Paul wrote, one form of letter only was in use, which grew or shrank, in the hand of a sensitive and earnest writer, according to the greater or less weight and interest of what he had to say. He draws therefore their attention to the very size of the letters which he used; an appeal, we may be sure, not likely to be lost upon the quick-feeling people whom he was addressing, and whose character and temperament he so thoroughly understood.

Verse 12. "As many as desire to make a fair shew in the flesh, they constrain you to be circumcised," &c. The *quality* and effect of the work which the judaizers were endeavouring to work among the

⁹ Not excepting even his Epistles to the Corinthians. He did not "travail in birth again" for them.

Churches of Galatia has already been fully shown; he now exposes boldly and unsparingly its *motive*. To beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy, was one of the Master's emphatic warnings to His disciples while on earth, and it was that same leaven which was here working with its usual deadly effect, unsuspected by those who should have known and refused it, in its evil contrariety to that which they had formerly received. Paul had come among them, in the power of Christ's blessed Gospel, to loose them from the bondage of their natural iniquity, and to turn their darkness into light and peace. His self-sent and self-deceived successors came to bind in a yet more fatal bond what he had loosed, and to entice them from the rock of their salvation to the pitfall of destruction. Full of external plausibility, these men had, to the discerning eye of the Spirit, an object quite alien from the truth and glory of God. Extolling Christ with lip-service, *they* were in reality both seeking themselves and shunning His reproach. They loved the praise of men, and had no mind to go forth without the camp to Him who suffered for His people there. Ignorant alike of the real power of the cross, and of the meaning of that which they were desiring to teach, they sought out means of shunning what they knew to be a burden and danger to the flesh, because, through lack of faith, they were without the joy of the Lord as their alone-sufficing strength. Thus to please themselves, and find favour among men, they were turning the truth of God into a lie, by compelling Christ's freedmen to resume the very yoke from which He died to set them free. And let it be well observed that this

effect follows (so far as human folly can disturb the work of God), whenever carnal ordinances of *any* kind are imposed as things necessary upon Christian men. The bearing of this principle upon the entire body of ecclesiastical world-systems need not be further pointed out, as it must be obvious to any reflecting mind.

Verse 13. "For not even they themselves who are circumcised keep the law," &c. The utter falsity and hollowness of all legal perversions of the gospel is here still further shown. Professing a zeal for holiness, there is nevertheless a lie in their right hand. They call on men to be their imitators in doing what they never do themselves at all. For, according to the plain dealing of the Spirit, circumcision profits if the law be kept; if otherwise, it becomes uncircumcision.¹ To be a law to others is a fool's delight, in his ignorance of his own slavery to sin. And this was what the troublers sought. Instead of desiring, as Paul did, the perfection of their brethren *in Christ*,² they wished only to conform them to *themselves*, and thus to glory in their flesh. That they were *Christians* was a minor consideration in their eyes; their end was gained if they could only call them Jews. And is not the same spirit openly at work before our eyes? How often is consistent "Churchmanship," for example, held of higher value than consistent Christianity or vital godliness! A multitude of worthless and soul-darkening ordinances of men shade constantly the bright face of God's living truth. Flesh wars still against the Spirit, and the theatre of strife is not the world only, but the

¹ Rom. ii. 25.

² 2 Cor. xiii. 9; Col. i. 28.

very house of God. The difference between the apostle's times and our own is, that *then* the hand of the enemy was beginning only to be seen; *now* error is the rule, and truth the rare and suffering exception, in that "great house" which still bears externally the name of Christ.

Verse 14. "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ," &c. Having now discharged thoroughly his task as a faithful reprover and vigilant defender of his brethren in the faith, and not less thoroughly unmasked the real character of that which set itself destructively against the truth, under the specious guise of a more than ordinary zeal for God, and care for their less favoured brethren of the Gentiles, he prepares to take farewell, as in the sight of God, of the children who had so severely proved his love. The time of decision has arrived. The opposite paths of truth and error are laid plainly open to their view. He cannot choose for them; to stand or fall lies with themselves, according to their acceptance or rejection of his words. With no further attempt, therefore, to convince or to move them, by appeals either to their understandings or their hearts, he steps forth before them all as a faithful standard-bearer, with God's everlasting banner in his hands, and as it were plights afresh his sacramental oath of fealty to the cross of Jesus Christ, his Lord and theirs. As one who knew thoroughly the kind of warfare he was waging, and felt victory already in his grasp, he avows exultingly his final and entire separation from the former things. His whole heart was in that which to the Jew is a stumbling-block, and folly to the Greek,

but which he knew and made his joyful boast of as the wisdom and power of God.

The *order* in which he here gives expression to his boast is well worthy of attention. In the true spirit of his Master, who despised its shame while His thoughts were on its everlasting fruits, Paul estimates the cross by its results, and by the worth of Him who died there for our sins. To him, and to all others who partake His faith, the cross was and is a token, first, of the death of the world, of whose bitter but futile hostility it is the emblem; and then of his own cessation from the world. The world was conquered, and its prince cast out, through the dying obedience of the Lamb. At the appointed time its kingdoms will become the actual possession of the just One, and a part of the promised heritage of those who are to reign with Him. Till then, the world, though full of the beauty of its Maker as well as of the blight which sin has wrought, is to one who sees things with Christ's eyes, as alive to God in Him by faith, a judged and crucified world. Order is disorder while creation groans, and the earth is burdened by the guilt of them that dwell on it; while, in a religious sense also, the world and its rudiments are things dead and out of mind to them that worship God in the Spirit, and rejoice only in the Lord. It is, with all its things, "behind" the runner of the race of faith; God and His glory being before him as the prize of his calling from above.

On the other hand he is voluntarily "crucified with Christ," and therefore to the world, which killed the Prince of Life and crucified the Lord of glory. Between Paul, therefore, and the preachers of circum-

cision there can be no sort of fellowship. What they are still seeking in their blindness, he had fled from and escaped ; finding refuge in Christ crucified from that ministration of death in which his adversaries madly put their trust. That world for whose ease and honour they were perilling their souls, he was shunning and refusing as a thing unclean. Their day was night to him ; their labour and their gains but waste and loss. The world was the platform of their energies and the prize for which they wrought. To him it was a wilderness, through which he had to pass, and a snare which kept him ever on his guard. He as a natural Israelite was dead ; he knew no longer either himself or his Messiah after the flesh.³ They were boasting that, as Israelites, they were the natural governors and guides of others, whom they honoured most, as they imagined, when they made them partakers of their pride. His confidence at least is clear and positive ; he knows whom he has believed, and is persuaded that his trust is not in vain. If others looked backwards, to their loss and danger, his eye should still be on the prize of his high calling in the Lord. The way was narrow, and he knew and felt it to be so ; yet to him it was a way of pleasantness and peace. With religion, as a thing of earth, he has done finally, and by faith has access to the true tabernacle in the heavens. Days, and months, and years, are lost for him, in the bright eternity of life and truth. The Christ to whom these ordinances pointed is already the portion of his faith ; and in the enjoyment of the substance he forgets the shadow. The world is for the living not the dead, and he has died

³ 2 Cor. v. 16.

with Christ; the life he now lives in it has its source and interests in another sphere. With the sharp sword of the Spirit he thus severs all connexion with the former things; disallowing all *claims* of the flesh, while ready as a succourer, in the fulness of the grace of Christ, to stretch forth helping hands to those who, in the fatal whirlpool of vanity and death, are desiring a saving knowledge of the Rock of life.

Verse 15. "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature." Faith and its work have already been opposed to the religious and irreligious forms of nature, in a verse which bears a close resemblance to this.⁴ We have now God's spiritual creation, without which neither faith nor love could have any place in us, contrasted, in its vital newness and completeness, with that which He has disallowed. Union with Christ, or identity, in newness of nature, with Him who is our life, is the true starting-point of Christian thought and judgment. The true believer is, as the effect of divine regeneration, in a new and entirely different region of consciousness. Old things are forgotten; wise and unwise alike remaining on the other side of that grave, which has now itself also become a spoil to those who are in Christ.⁵ The believer is himself a new creation, though surrounded and hampered by the old. Hence conflict, with the alternations of defeat and victory, in our personal experience. But we are God's workmanship, and we know that what He has created in Christ Jesus for Himself, endures and is for ever. Now what He has wrought His children for is the glory unto which,

⁴ *Ante*, chap. v. 6.

⁵ 1 Cor. iii. 22; Hosea xiii. 14.

in the person of their exalted Forerunner, they are already brought. The house which we are to inherit is prepared, and is our *own*—we know or, if believers, ought to know, that we *have* such a building in the heavens.⁶ And if we know this we shall not be satisfied to linger idly here below, but shall labour rather, in anticipation of the coming day of recompences, to be acceptable in the sight of Him who redeemed and saved us for Himself, and whom our calling, as saved persons, is to *serve*.⁷

Verse 16. “And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.” If we regard the teaching of this epistle in its due relation to the mystery of divine calling and purpose elsewhere expounded at large,⁸ we shall find more in this verse than a valedictory invocation of peace and mercy on consistent Christians. His desire, as a man full of the Holy Ghost, goes beyond the limits of the present dispensation. But let us deal with it according to the forms of its expression. Peace and mercy are the benediction of the Spirit on the new creature in its walk. It is in Jesus that His saints have righteousness, and by Him therefore peace—He is their peace. From Jesus too they look for mercy, both now and in the coming day.⁹ As a faithful and merciful High Priest He upholds and comforts, through the Spirit who reveals Him, the true worshippers who call upon the Father in His name. At the end as well as the beginning of our confidence, His mercy and lovingkindness, which

⁶ 2 Cor. v. 1-5.

⁷ 2 Cor. v. 8-10; Titus ii. 14.

⁸ *Notes on Romans*, chaps. ix.-xi. inclusive, especially on chap. xi.

⁹ Jude 21.

compass them that love Him, and follow them through all the varied stages of their pilgrimage, will rest finally upon the heads of His redeemed as a crown of righteousness and life. But there is a *rule* to walk by, and Jesus is Himself that rule. To walk as He walked is the *duty* of all who say that they abide in Him,¹ and He has left us an example that we should follow His steps;² but the *power* of a Christlike walk is the faith that cleaves to and lives upon Himself. To walk like Him, as imitators of His ways, we must walk in Him also whom we have received.³

The counterpart of this is carelessness and spiritual insubjection, which bring also their own consequences. God has neither peace nor mercy for a wilful walk, which, while it continues, is an interruption of true fellowship with the Father of our spirits, and therefore of all personal blessing. He judges the ways of those who name His name, according to the truth and sanctity of His nature, as well as the faithful tenderness of the relationship which sovereign grace has formed. A child may be no bastard, and yet for awhile walk frowardly, and for such correction is prepared, in harmony with those sure mercies which are God's eternal gifts in Christ to His redeemed.⁴ Thus there is mercy in store, and peace at the end, for all who truly are 'of God;' while there is anger in present judgment for them that in their ways provoke.⁵ Christ's final mercy is for those even who are pulled out of the fire by a love which saves with fear; but its present enjoyment is for such only as know and cleave to Him, as the Shepherd and Bishop

¹ 1 John ii. 6.² 1 Peter ii. 21.³ Col. ii. 6.⁴ Psalm lxxxix. 30-33.⁵ 1 Cor. x. 22; xi. 31.

of their souls. God never countenances sin of any kind; but, as the apostle has shown so clearly, the tampering of the Galatians with the law would, if persisted in, reduce them to a state of systematic sin, and imperil the salvation of their souls. For the scriptures which are able to make us wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus, they were dishonouring by their disposition to return from Christ to Moses, and from the record of life eternal to the ministry of death. He had warned them and instructed; would they hearken to His words? He had once more set before them an example of faith's wisdom in himself, their spiritual father; will they follow it? If they did, they also would be far from fainting, as He was;⁶ but if they chose another rule they must expect also a different end from His. *Christ* at least was to be found in no other way, and won by no other means.

But this is not all. The peace and mercy which he seeks for them he seeks also, in their season, for "the Israel of God." What then does he intend by this expression? First, on the authority of his own teaching in the third chapter of this epistle, as well as in others addressed to the Gentile Churches,⁷ we may fairly apply it both to the Church at large, and in a narrower sense to that part of it which consists of the present election out of the natural Israel. But it is not less evident from other parts of his writings that the ulterior destiny of Israel, as a nation, was not only a point of intense personal interest in

⁶ 2 Cor. iv. 1.

⁷ Especially in Phil. iii. 3. Compare also Rom. iv. *passim*, and Col. ii. 11.

his eyes, but that an exposition of the mystery of God's dealings, both present and prospective, with that nation forms an important part of the ministry that was committed to him as the apostle of the Gentiles. They who, as concerning the gospel are, while the vail remains upon their hearts, accounted enemies for our sakes, are yet, as touching the election, beloved for the fathers' sakes.⁶ There is an election now. There is a larger election yet to come.⁹ Israel, which is an empty vine, so long as in the spirit of self-righteous perverseness he brings forth fruit unto himself,¹ will yet be known among the Gentiles as the seed which Jehovah blesses and will bless.² No longer following the blind leaders who have led them to the place of stones, they shall in that day be all taught of God. They shall be all righteous; they shall inherit the land for ever, the branch of His planting, the work of His hands, that He may be glorified.³ For Jehovah will have mercy upon Jacob, and will yet choose Israel, and set them *in their own land*, when the pride of all glory shall have been stained in the dust of Babylon the great.⁴ Like a river shall the peace of Zion flow, when the wrath which is now on the rebellious people till the end of the indignation come shall have reached its measure, and be succeeded by His everlasting kindness in the times of restitution.⁵ The frustrated desire of Him, who sought first to Zion for her own redemption of her pledge, shall be realised in the sufficiency of His own

⁶ Rom. xi. 28.

⁹ 1 Peter ii. 9, 10; Isaiah xiv. 1.

¹ Hosea x. 1; Rom. x. 3, 21.

² Isaiah lxi. 9.

³ Isaiah liv. 13; lxx. 22.

⁴ Isaiah xiv. 1-4.

⁵ 1 Thess. ii. 16; Isaiah liv. 5-8; Acts iii. 21.

righteousness in the day when His arm, now hidden in His bosom, is once more revealed.⁶ The long neglected vine shall then revive; Israel shall blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit; for the Redeemer of Abraham shall yet fulfil His promise to the house of Jacob.⁷ The reluctant Forsaker of Jerusalem will return to her with mercies when His own set time is come.⁸

To quote all the passages relating to the latter-day hope of Israel would be to transcribe the larger part of the prophetic Scriptures. What I am anxious rather to impress upon my reader is the very important, but too often neglected consideration, that Gospel and prophecy are continually blended in the Spirit's testimony to ourselves. That Israel's prospective blessing should be here intimated to the Galatians is quite in keeping with the whole cast of the epistle. False Jewish teaching was corrupting the churches of Christ which were then existing in that region. In his endeavour to defeat and counteract this deadly work of Satan, he has shown clearly the utter falsity of legal hopes of any kind for either Jew or Gentile.⁹ He has declared, also, that in the mystic body of Christ is neither Greek nor Jew.¹ Moreover, Jerusalem that now is, is in bondage with her children, while Jerusalem above is the mother of the free.² The children of the bondwoman are exiles from their land and wanderers from the way of peace. But it remains written among the sure testimonies of God, as re-

⁶ Isaiah xlviii. 17-19; Psalm cx. 1; lxxiv. 11; lxxx. 17.

⁷ Isaiah xxvii. 6; xxix. 22-24.

⁸ Luke xiii. 34, 35; Zech. ii. 10-12; Psalm cii. 16.

⁹ Chap. ii. 15, *seq.* ¹ Chap. iii. 28. ² Chap. iv. 25, 26.

corded by the spirit of prophecy, that "Israel hath not been forsaken, nor Judah of his God, of Jehovah of hosts; although their land was filled with sin against the Holy One of Israel."³ She who now is desolate, a captive, and removing to and fro, shall yet be called, "Sought out, A city not forsaken."⁴ The gifts and promises of God are without repentance. He knows, and has declared, the thoughts that He thinks towards them, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give them an expected end of grace and glory in Immanuel's land.⁵ The zeal of the Lord of hosts will fulfil His own true sayings in their time.⁶

In view, therefore, of these considerations, I entertain no doubt whatever that the latter clause of this verse had, in the mind of the apostle, an especial reference to the nation of his birth. And surely it is well that we Gentiles, who are now by grace partakers of their spiritual things, should heed carefully his solemn warning as to the danger of overlooking the mystery of the present dispensation. Blindness in part has happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. The Lord has long been gathering His elect from among the nations of the world, and at a time least expected by those who only have a name to live, His present work will reach its end. A despised law was the occasion of Israel's first captivity. A despised and rejected Messiah has given Jerusalem to be a treading down of the Gentiles until the time of their supremacy is past.⁷ But the ruin of that which calls itself Christendom will be a neglected and corrupted Gospel, and a self-

³ Jer. li. 5. ⁴ Isaiah lxii. 12. ⁵ Jer. xxix. 11; xxx. xxxi.

⁶ Isaiah ix. 7.

⁷ Luke xxi. 24.

satisfied neglect of the prophetic warnings of the Spirit. What does not continue, by faith, in the goodness of God will prove His severity in the coming day of decision. But peace and mercy are the secured heritage of God's elect; whether the Church of the First-born, the first-fruits of His creatures *now*, or the Israel whom God will own and bless as His accepted people in the age to come.

Verse 17. "From henceforth let none trouble me: for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus." His task is done. His part is chosen, and he trusts confidently that it is the better part. With perverse disputings and opposings of the way of godliness, he will have no more to do. Discussion is out of place, when God has both spoken and abundantly attested His own word. Others, who loved leasing rather than God's living Truth, might turn aside to vain jangling, and heap to themselves teachers who should flatter and deceive their itching ears. But let none trouble Paul with questionings about the law, or questionings of any other kind. Truth is above question as the meat of faith. He had tasted, and he loved and lived on it, and meant to live on it for ever. He had both heard and seen the Lord, and for His name's sake he had suffered in his flesh. If any of them, who once had for a while endured like things, were now disposed to think lightly of the afflictions of the Gospel, he did not. For to him they carried the whole value and comfort of the Name for which he suffered. He, at least, had not "suffered so many things in vain."⁸ In contending for the faith once delivered to the saints he was not

⁸ *Ante*, chap. iii. 4.

beating the air, but striving for a mastery which should not disappoint his hope. He was Christ's slave, to serve and glory in, as well as His freedman in the presence of his former lords. The marks of Christ's ownership were on his body, which the ploughers of wickedness had furrowed in their spite.⁹ What he had laid on others had recoiled, not vengefully but as a special mark of grace, upon himself.¹ Such afflictions were his glory and his joy. He knew who had chosen him to be His soldier, and the scars, which proved his faithful warfare, were his honour and his praise. But, if so, what manner of warfare were these cross-shunning corrupters of the Gospel waging, and what master did they serve? Let Galatians and their modern imitators think of this. We shun the cross when we forget the grace of Him who did not shun it for our sakes; but if we deny Him, we cannot be ourselves confessed.² As to Paul, he knew, and would have us know, the excellency of Jesus Christ his Lord. If any preferred earthly things, he had tears for their choice, but was bound, for his own part, unswervingly for heaven. If others sought glory in the flesh, they should find in him no abettor of their folly, but an unflinching denouncer of their sin. Compromise he will have none. Christ must not be dishonoured by association with other objects. The wine of sound doctrine must not be mixed with the water of empty tradition, nor adulterated by the false activities of human thought. The Spirit is against the fleshly *mind* as well as the fleshly *will*. Thus he wraps him in the mantle of

⁹ Psalm cxxix. 3.

¹ Acts xxvi. 11; ix. 16.

² 2 Tim. ii. 12.

his calling, and already is in act to go. Let who would follow where he led; but, if alone, his way was clear, and his heart full fixed on the winning of the prize for which he ran.

Verse 18. "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brethren. Amen." A sweet and confiding close to his earnest yet loving expostulation. Not allowing himself to doubt that most, if not all, of those whom he addressed would heed his words, he commends them to the grace of our common Lord, whose readiness to pardon and restore might, he knew, be reckoned on for a complete redressing of the mischief which the destroyer had been plotting to effect. His own heart and face are towards the Lord, and he leaves them with a benediction in the only name through which a blessing can descend. While law was in their minds, grace was not with their spirit, nor could be; but the Lord is swiftly willing to return to them that will return to Him. May the words of His messenger be verified in us who read them, to the praise and glory of His ever blessed Name!

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